

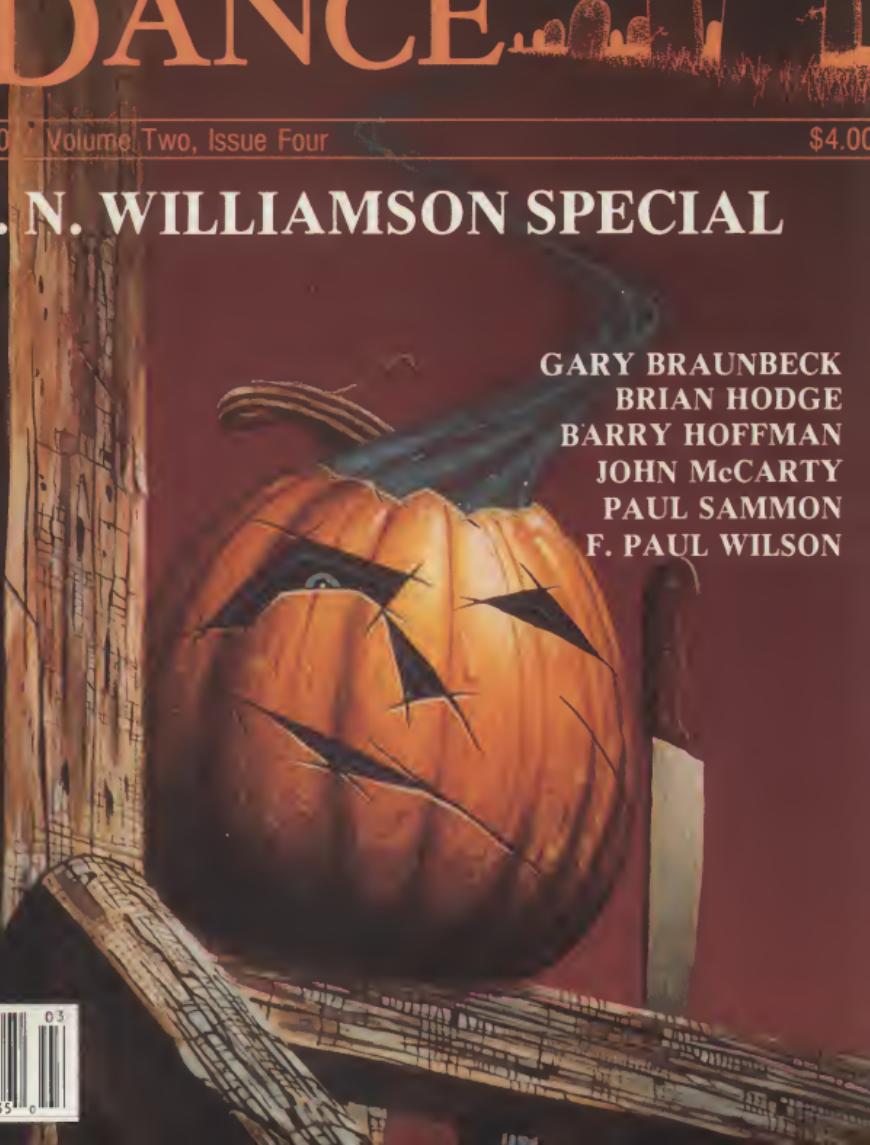
CEMETERY DANCE

FALL 1990

Volume Two, Issue Four

\$4.00

J. N. WILLIAMSON SPECIAL



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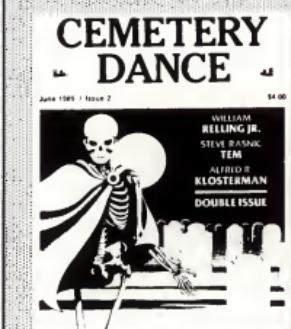
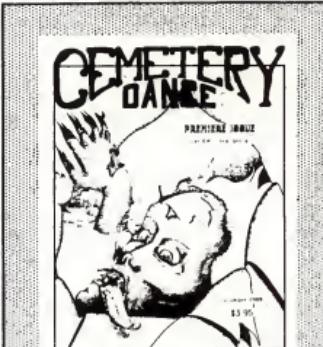
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WORDS FROM THE EDITOR

CEMETERY DANCE #6 -- Welcome back to another issue of *Cemetery Dance*, the magazine of dark mystery fiction, non-fiction features, columns, news, and reviews. If you have picked us up from a bookstore and are reading us for the very first time . . . enjoy this J.N. Williamson Special. We hope you are impressed enough to subscribe or keep an eye out for the Joe R. Lansdale Special, arriving at bookstores on January 25.

*

We have some excellent surprises in store for you this time around. Enjoy an insightful interview with horror megastar Jerry Williamson, read his latest creation (a chilling and thought-provoking new tale), then read what several of his colleagues (Robert Bloch, William F. Nolan and several others) have to say about J.N. Williamson, the man and the author.

The fiction line-up is headed by rising star Gary Brauneck's stunning novella, "To His Children In Darkness," a Brian Hodge novel excerpt from the forthcoming Dell release, *Nightlife*, and a half-dozen dark mystery thrillers, including work by Barry Hoffman, David Dug-gins, David Niall Wilson, Jessica Palmer, and Stefan Jackson.

Our non-fiction columns are in fine shape, too. Ed Gorman debuts this issue with his informative column, "Gormania", as does Paul Sammon with his film-covering "Rough Cuts." Two splendid additions to our staff! T. Liam McDonald returns this Fall with a lengthy interview with cross-genre legend, F. Paul Wilson, while Joseph Citro shines his spotlight on The King of Splatter, John McCarty. Ed Bryant and Lori Perkins are also present with reviews of the hottest novels in the book stores. Finally, if you haven't already noticed, the front cover is once again a creation of the wonderful Charles Lang.

*

Horror novelist Matthew Costello (*Midsummer, Beneath Still Waters*) will replace Chris Lacher as a Contributing Editor, beginning his commentary column

in the Winter issue. Matthew is a welcome addition to these pages and we all look forward to working with him!

*

The response to our last issue -- the Rick Hautala feature -- was tremendous. Judging by reader feedback, favorite features were the Charles Lang front cover, the interviews with Chet Williamson, Stan Wiater, and Ed Gorman and, of course, the entire Hautala section. Reader opinion was fairly well divided on the fourteen short stories.

*

Next issue should be a big seller, with a Joe R. Lansdale feature section (fiction, non-fiction and interview), a *Hot Blood II* Sneak Preview (complete with story excerpts), new Graham Masterton fiction, a Joe Citro novel excerpt, and much, much more. Look for it!

*

Another reminder: *COLD BLOOD: New Tales of Mystery & Horror* is slated for an end-of-the-year release by Ziesing Press. The hardcover anthology promises to be an excellent cross-genre showcase for the best authors in the field. Turn back to Page 1 for a sneak preview. And don't forget to write or call Mark Ziesing for ordering information.

*

Enough for this issue. Time to turn the page and start the dance. Please remember . . . Ingram Periodicals is now officially *Cemetery Dance*'s bookstore distributor. If you frequent a chain or independent book store, please ask the manager to order *Cemetery Dance*. Enjoy . . .

-- Richard T. Chizmar

DEPTH OF REFLECTION

DAVID L. DUGGINS marks his third appearance in *Cemetery Dance* with the following dark mystery thriller. Duggins, a serviceman stationed overseas, has appeared twice in *FEAR*, Britain's slick monthly, and has sold fiction to several other horror publications. He is currently working on his second novel.

Schulton saw thick black curtains, a canyon of bronzed light between; the dull glimmer of red-stained plastic covering the bed; a mirrored opposite wall, a dark smudge of shadowy movement behind him contained in one reflective pane.

His profession demanded that he analyze a situation, draw conclusions and act on decisions quickly. Schulton was consummately professional.

He barely had time to move before the knife went in.

He was immersed in the reports of the first three victims when Eldridge phoned him concerning a fourth. Schulton picked up the receiver on the first ring, certain of who it was, what is was about.

"Who, where, when, and what?" he said tiredly, opening his notebook, pen ready.

"Woman, late twenties, walking lakeside in Abernathy Park late last night, we figure between midnight and one. She left a friend's house alone. Probably cut across the park to save time."

"So much for the 'Break-in Killer.'" Schulton lit a cigarette, dragged deeply; the smoke grated his lungs raw. His head throbbed. He hadn't slept in twenty-eight hours.

"Pretty sure this is our boy again. Multiple stab wounds with a heavy, narrow blade, four in a row beginning at the base of the neck and terminating just above the left eyebrow."

"Body?"

"Eviscerated."

Schulton's head sagged. Eviscerated. The word was a dark canon in his mind.

"He leaves a note?"

"Yep. Weirder than the last one."

Schulton sighed, rubbed his temples.

"Is Talbot with you?"

"He's here."

"Send him home. Take his notes. Get Kelly in there and brief him. Tell Talbot to stay home for the next

two days. I'm changing the rotation."

"Who's relieving you?"

Schulton shrugged, laughed. "I've got no weekend plans," he said.

"Bullshit," Eldridge said pleasantly.

"Any trace? Did he go in?"

"Penetration after death, as before. No pubes, no semen. Careful."

"Rhythm method."

"More than that." Eldridge paused. "They've done her smear out here with the Mobilab. Identified a neutral PH lubricant."

Schulton frowned. "What's that about?"

"Our boy's using a condom," Eldridge said.

Schulton grimaced as the blade ground against rib, sank into tough muscle tissue. Stabbing a person was not like slicing butter, he knew; skin and sinew are elastic, stringy. The steel stopped short of internal organs.

The hand powering it began to twist clockwise. Anticipating agony, Schulton brought his right arm across his body to lock the wrist. The hand froze. Sliding his own hand toward the fingers, he pressed down on the knuckles until the pinky and ring fingers loosened around the hilt. Using his thumb as a lever, Schulton clasped the fingers, drew them up toward the back of the hand, then jerked and twisted. There was a sound like icicles ripped from metal guttering. The man backed off, gasping.

Man, Schulton thought. Definitely a man.

He withdrew the knife. His teeth ground together. The edge was serrated.

The man was crouched, holding his fingers, moaning; Schulton pistoned his foot up for a roundhouse kick to the temple.

A heartbeat later Schulton was flat on his back. His ankle would bruise and swell; he would be lucky to have children. The kick had been blocked, countered offensively by an ill-placed groinchop. Half-an-inch left and Schulton would have been singing soprano.

His mind seized details: Combat training. Field techniques. Maybe 'Nam. Special Forces.

A dark hurtling shape filled his vision, and he shut his mind up.

The first three were: Jessie Allen Harms, male, age twelve, stabbed to death, face mutilated with four upward cuts, right to left, eviscerated, sodomized, July 12; Oliver Abry, male, age seventy-eight, stabbed, body

mutilated with weapons identical to Harms boy, also sodomized, August 19; Marie Essex, female, age nineteen, stabbed, body mutilated, eviscerated, raped, August 30.

Common denominators: All victims attacked at night, in their own homes (exception on file: latest case), no evidence of forced entry to premises. No witnesses. Evidence of similar or same weapon used in all cases; bodies treated similarly and penetrated in one or more orifices following death. Notes left on corpses. No trace evidence, until this morning's case turned up condom lubricant in the victim's vagina. Not exactly helpful.

Until the Essex girl turned up, they thought they might have a female killer, performing penetrations with an artificial phallus to throw suspicion. Now they weren't sure. Marie Essex had been a student at East Windsor school for the handicapped. She had been getting dressed for a movie with friends; the killer entered through either open window or unlocked door while she sat at her vanity table putting on makeup. Marie was a quietly pretty girl. She had a mental age of five.

The killer seemed to enjoy catching his victims primping.

Schluton was on his feet cat-quick, in a defensive stance. His side sang pain. The late-afternoon light was bad, getting worse. He wouldn't see blows coming until-

A hand sailed out of darkness toward his throat. Schluton blocked, dropped, punched where he thought gut might be. He connected high, just above the breastbone. The man went back, lost balance, found it and sidestepped out of the path of a leg sweep.

Schluton tightened his throat against a wave of pain and nausea. If he kicked with the left leg again, tearing the stab wound, he would pass out. He turned his body sideways, jabbed solid darkness with his right hand. He heard the man back off. Schluton slid forward, pressing the advantage.

There was movement in his peripheral vision. But the man was in front of him, Schluton was certain. Sound painted this picture clearly.

A second man!

Schluton stepped back, sought a position. He glanced over.

A flash of light caught the mirror. Sundown, outside.

"Oh fu--" Schluton began, and then he was down, under punches.

At ten-thirty Schluton drove back to the office from his combat karate class, feeling stronger, fresher, invigorated. He could tackle another eighteen hours; he had sparred against Sensei Deaton and dropped him in three quick moves.

He locked the door and unlocked the file.

Common denominators. Links to personality, psychological profiles, comparisons to existing files in Washington's big computer. That was something.

The notes were the best of them. They were run off a word processor, but they were still valuable. They were a peek into his head.

Pinned to Harm's body: You will understand/the nature of divine/when we join in reflection/your cold hand in mine.

Abry: Beowulf took Grendel on field of battle fair/Sword and shield on tooth and claw -- cries echoed in the air/Beowulf, victorious, stood proud as Grendel died/Beowulf, the fool, not knowing Grendel was inside.

Essex: First springtime in Eden/saw the first Snake born/Snake he tempted Adam/but met with Adam's scorn/Snake said I can't crack him/Maybe Eve will find me true/Snake offered Eve the apple/She said 'don't mind if I do.'

Schluton stared uncomprehendingly at the blocks of computer-generated verse, thinking of facts and connections. Victims. Evidence. Common denominators.

When we join in reflection/your cold hand in mine.

Except for the latest case, his victims had all been looking in a mirror when they were attacked.

She had been getting dressed for a movie with friends; the killer entered through either open window or unlocked door while she sat at her vanity table putting on makeup.

The killer seemed to enjoy catching his victims primping...

Sweet, Schluton thought muddily. Japped by my own reflection.

He brought his right leg up to clear a path through the hammer-hail of punches, jabs and chops; rolling sideways, he crawled until his head gave him leave to use his feet. Putting the mirror behind him, he stood, waited, listening.

There. The chug-chug-chug of labored breathing. He's tiring, Schluton thought. Figured he'd take me out with the knife; didn't count on a stand-up.

Kneeling, Schluton swept both hands over the floor. His right encountered a metal bowl; his left closed around the leg of a chair. He rose. His knees popped; his left side howled; the cold, vicious contents of the bowl spilled down his arm.

He could guess what was in the bowl. There was

no time to think about it.

He threw the chair and the bowl at right angles to his body. The sudden sounds from widely separated parts of the room would startle the man, give away his position and cover Schulton's lunge toward him.

No. The chair struck the man, startling a shout from him. Schulton had completely misjudged his position. He moved very, very quietly.

Close enough, Schulton thought, and dived at the sound.

"New theories," Eldridge said. "Very little blood around the last body, the woman in the park. He killed her elsewhere, probably in her home like the others, and moved her immediately after. Realized he was getting predictable, maybe. No doubt he's got a hideout somewhere. We also think he wears rubber."

"You told me that already."

"No, I mean all over. Maybe military issue chem warfare gloves. We found prints in the mud by the lake. Strange track, shallow and wide, weird shape. Could match overboots worn during military chem warfare exercises. The rest of his stuff might be surplus as well."

"How many warehouses in the borough?"

"Five," Eldridge said. "We're checking. But they could be mail-order."

"It's something," Schulton said glumly as he hung up.

He put his shoulder forward and went airborne, connecting solidly with a shape that stumbled and lost air with a muffled "Whmph!" They went down, Schulton using the man as a sled; head connected with wall and the man lay still. A runner of blood coursed down the side of his nose.

Schulton's fingers closed around his neck.

The man's hands flew up, clawed at his upper thighs.

Still on his back, the man's hands grasped and dug. Schulton tried to break away.

The left hand -- used to deliver a near-fatal groin chop -- found the knife wound in Schulton's side.

Schulton struggled desperately, with frenzied strength.

The fingers pried the lips of the wound apart.

Schulton gasped.

The hand dove in.

Schulton screamed.

He stepped out for a burger at twelve-thirty, eyes bleary from reading straight off the CRT.

The phone rang as he came back in.

"Enlighten me," Schulton said, expecting Eldridge.

"Indeed I will," a stranger's voice replied. "I'm five-seventeen, black hair, one eighty-five. Dark, swarthy complexion. Brown eyes. Blood type O positive. You'll never

get prints, you'll never get trace and you'll never, never catch me."

"We've got trace, you son-of-a-bitch," Schulton said, unsure if caller was killer but wanting to throw a scare into whoever it was. The caller had already hung up. Schulton wrote furiously with one hand, dialing Eldridge's car phone with the other.

"He called once," Eldridge said. "He'll call again."

Eldridge had nothing new on his end. Schulton hung up, frustrated, and requested line-tap gear. Then he sat staring at the phone for the next two hours.

At four-seventeen it rang again.

The killer also had a car phone. He hung up after ten seconds. He had only called to laugh.

Schulton drove his fist into the back of the man's head, grimning fiercely at the sound of teeth breaking against the hardwood. The hand dropped away from Schulton's wounded side. Schulton gained his feet and dragged the man up. Spitting teeth, he punched out; Schulton grabbed the fist and lowered it, wrenching the man around and ran the arm up his back. He dug his other hand into the hair at the back of the man's neck.

He listened to the fury at work in his mind. He dragged the man backward, then sideways. The man struggled, kicked at his ankles, struck out with his free hand.

Schulton drove the pinned arm higher and slid the unwilling man across the floor toward the mirror.

He had to sleep; thirty-two hours awake was robbing him of his concentration. They were still collating data; it might take weeks to track down the computer that generated the notes, months to trace the military gear.

The parking garage was across the street from his office. He trotted through light mid-afternoon traffic. A little girl, maybe five or six, stood by a blue hatchback across from his Pontiac. Waiting for Mom, probably. He grinned at her haggardly. She recoiled, pulling back. He wasn't surprised; he must have looked as awful as he felt.

The little girl said, "I don't want an apple."

Schulton turned, grinned again, uncertainly.

The little girl pouted. "That's what I told him and I told the man to go away. I told him I didn't want an apple and to go away."

Schulton's eyes glinted. The girl stepped back again, regarded him seriously, her own eyes dark with worry.

"Who?" Schulton approached her slowly, knelt, putting them eye-to-eye. "Did someone try to scare you, honey?"

She nodded. "Like in Billy Goat's Gruff. But I didn't want an apple and I didn't want a poem and I told him to go away."

Schulton resisted the sudden urge to reach out and grab her shoulders. "Who? Who asked you if you wanted

a poem?"

"The troll," the little girl said. "He was big and smelled bad. I told him to go away."

"Which way did he go, honey?"

"He was a troll but he didn't come out from under a bridge," the little girl explained. "He came out from under the car."

She pointed to his Pontiac.

Schluton turned, got down on all fours, and looked.

A small black box, barely two inches wide, was attached just beneath the driver's seat.

Schluton turned to the girl again. "Which way?" he hissed pleadingly.

The girl pointed. "That's him," she said.

Schluton looked.

Average height. Black trenchcoat. Cool, smooth walk. Three blocks away, moving west, toward downtown.

Schluton had run twenty steps when the car exploded. Bad wire, Schluton thought. Most such devices were triggered by the ignition.

He whirled.

The little girl was there. Her feet protruded from the shattered windshield of the blue hatchback. They were burning. Blood darkened the glass.

Her head had rolled under the right front wheel. Open eyes, pretty green eyes, stared out into the street.

Schluton looked back. The man kept walking, didn't look around.

Schluton called Eldridge.

Eldridge tailed him personally, Kelly behind.

Schluton waited until they called in the address, and then he came too. It was five-thirty-one when he approached the front door.

"I'm going in," he told Eldridge. "Alone."

"Fuck you are," Eldridge replied amicably.

Schluton grabbed him by the collar and slammed him against his car. "Don't follow me," he breathed.

Eldridge swallowed, shook his head. "You're looking at suspension, man."

Schluton strode up the front walk. He took off his shoes, went through the front door in his sock feet.

Inside, he drew his pistol. Black curtains, plastic bedcover, mirrored wall and movement. He was struck from behind and the gun was knocked from his hand and the knife came up—

He jerked the man in front of the mirror, shoved his face against the glass and for a moment the man's eyes were like mirrors, opaque, silvery, reflecting twin fisheye images of himself and Schluton.

Schluton drew his hand away from the glass. The man began to whimper.

"No," he said. "Please."

Schluton hesitated.

"No."



Schluton stared at their reflected images.

"Please."

Schluton heard the fury.

"No, God, please *don't throw me in there!*" the man suddenly screamed.

Schluton's mind filled with red-stained porcelain, hot screams and lunatic shadows; his grip tightened and he was judge jury and executioner a black grinding death-engine with blood-greased gears he was a cauldron boiling a Snake telling Eve to eat the apple he was Grendel and Beowulf all in one and his hands were cold he was--

--calm, his fingers relaxing, eyes fluttering, breath ragged. He inhaled, gagged, spat blood. Nosebleed. He couldn't remember being punched in the face.

The man quivered. The man moaned.

Schluton grabbed him by the shoulders and threw him into the glass.

He sank up to his chest and stuck. Glass rippled like water.

And something grabbed him.

Schluton was paralyzed for an untellable span of seconds; then, forcefully animated by sudden adrenal he leapt forward, grasped the man, pulled. He didn't budge. His legs began to kick. He was yanked sideways. His back arched. Schluton tugged, and the more he tugged, the more the man kicked and squirmed.

He grabbed the man around the waist, shuffled back a step, planted his feet, and pulled. All of his weight was behind it.

The mirror shattered, raining glittering fragments, and the man fell free. His face was bloodrag, with knowing eyes. His shredded lips moved and his throat clicked and one hand clutched at nothing, and by the time he hit the floor he was dead.

Schluton stared at four deep ragged cuts, left to right, across the man's face; at the cavern of his upper abdomen, trailing loose purple coils.

His left arm was cut deeply, his right hand severed, but these injuries had been caused by sharp edges of broken mirror glass.

The face . . . and the disembowelment . . .

Schluton looked into the mirror and wasn't sure what he saw.

There were three bodies downstairs, two women,

one man. Schluton stood in the doorway while lab roaches crawled the place and sprayed, collected, collated, indexed, dusted, printed and photographed. They laughed, scuttling efficiently through the ruins of three lives. Upstairs, the man's body had already been bagged and taken away. "What a mess," one of the guys in the cleanup crew had said. "He's not even all here. Where the fuck's his--"

"Just take what you see," Schluton snapped. The guy shut up.

The three downstairs were hollowed out. There were no notes; instead, an apple had been placed in each chest cavity, where the heart had been.

At home, he undressed carefully, ran a warm menthol bath. Sparring with Deaton was civilized compared to this afternoon's romp-and-stomp. A half hour's soak left him feeling more human. He moved to his bedroom, toweling off and slipping into a robe. He sat on the edge of the bed and worked the back of his neck with the heel of his right hand.

You will understand/the nature of divine/When we join in reflection/your cold hand in mine . . .

Rising slowly, Schluton opened his wardrobe cabinet. Inside, his overcoat hung neatly beside suits he never wore.

The pocket bulged invitingly.

There was a full-length dressing mirror on the inside of the door.

Schluton pulled a chair up to the mirror, sat again. He reached into his overcoat pocket.

More than anything, he wanted to see the killer's face. He wished for a camera, but knew it wouldn't matter, just as he knew his gun wouldn't matter. Staring at his own white, fatigued face in the mirror, he understood almost everything.

There had been at least an inch of separation between the cuts across the victim's faces.

Whatever the killer was, it was large.

Perhaps it would look a bit like Grendel. A bit like the Snake.

It seemed to need flesh to work through.

Schluton removed the severed hand from his coat pocket.

He just wanted to see its face.

When he threw the hand at the mirror, he was sure he would.

-- CD

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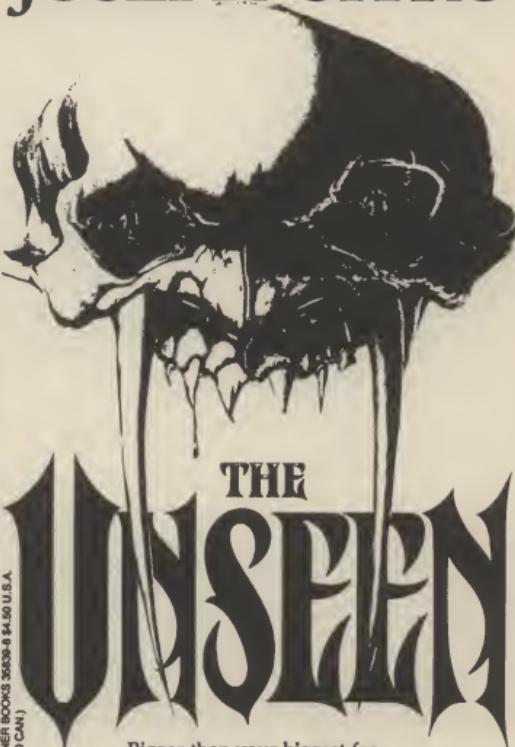
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THE GIFT

JESSICA PALMER lives in Middlesex, England. She has sold short stories to *Skeleton Crew*, a British genre magazine, and several other publications. Her first novel is due soon from American publisher Pocket Books. "The Gift" is an emotional tale of domestic terror.

Colors bathed the darkened bedroom in vibrant light, flashing intermittently as the strand of delicate Italian bulbs on the Christmas tree blinked on and off. Various hues -- pastel pink, powder blue, luscious green -- splashed against the wall revealing a small dark-haired child huddled against the head of the bed. The melodious strains of *Silent Night* were interrupted by the harsh bray of her parents' voices, who argued in a shrieking staccato.

Julie hugged her pillow against her chest and tried to shut out the sound. Her mother emerged from the living room followed by a barrage of obscenities. Julie pulled the crumpled covers over her head. Anna Swanson crept softly toward the kitchen and didn't notice the quivering bundle on the bed.

Julie listened as her mother rifled through kitchen drawers. Metal clattered and doors slammed. With a muted cry, the search ended, and Anna returned the way she came. This time she noticed her daughter, staring wide-eyed from the bed at the butcher knife Anna held in her hand.

Nervously, almost apologetically, she placed the knife on the bedside table. "Don't worry, honey, Daddy's had a little too much to drink tonight. Everything will be all right in the morning. Now lay down and say your prayers."

Eying the gleaming blade, Julie knelt next to the bed. "Father-mother God . . ." Julie began.

"No, dear, not that one."

Julie shrank, leaning against her mother's knees. "Please, momma."

"Come on, hurry up."

Julie sighed, resigned.

*Now I lay me down to sleep.
I pray the Lord my soul to keep.
If I die before I wake,
I pray the Lord my soul to take.*

Satisfied, Anna prodded her daughter, nudging her gently until she climbed into bed. Absentmindedly, she kissed the little girl's cheek and moved silently toward the hall. Julie watched the shrinking sliver of light

while the prayer's words still echoed around the room.
The bad prayer.

Julie wanted to shout at her mother, to beg, to plead, "please momma, don't close the door." As the darkness swallowed her, she wished she had a night light; but she was too big for that -- after all, Julie was almost four years old.

She shivered when she heard the final turn of the knob and the click of the cylinder in the template. The words of the prayer pounded into her brain with a triphammer beat. *NOW I LAY ME DOWN TO SLEEP.* She whimpered.

Savage growls and shouts erupted from the living room. The battle began, and the argument picked up where it had been left, without missing a beat. Her mother hurled a mental catalog of complaints at her husband, and he replied with a drunken slur.

IF I DIE . . . The words echoed, inextricably interwoven with her parent's fight. Julie dove under the comforting confines of the sheets and crawled to the foot of the bed where she kept a flashlight. She pulled her pillows and her stuffed bear from behind her and constructed a frame to make a tent. The bulging blankets glowed, an orange-red lump in the middle of the bed.

The bad prayer. She didn't like that prayer. Every time she said it -- said the words: 'If I die' -- it felt somehow like a curse. She could envision an angry God, with flowing white robes and a beard, reaching down from heaven to pluck her from her bed for some unknown sin. Every morning after she said it, she had to check -- her hands, her feet, her toes -- to make sure she still lived.

The bad prayer. Julie didn't like it when her mother made her say *that* prayer. There were other prayers, better prayers. Her mother seemed to know of her secret fear, for she never made Julie say *bad prayer* unless she was mad -- either at Julie or her father.

Julie sat Indian style in her nice safe cocoon, blankets heaped over her head, and thought about the prayer. She wished her mother had let her say the *Foot Prayer*. Now that was a good prayer; it made her happy, giggly. She mouthed the words, hoping they would dispel the other.

*Father, Mother God, loving me,
Guard me while I sleep.
Guide my little feet,
Up to thee.*

It worked its magic, and Julie giggled. She felt protected when she said it. It was a funny prayer. Julie never quite understood what it was God wanted with her feet -- she examined the little pink pads on each toe and the lines on the wrinkled sole -- but if He wanted her feet for the night, He could have them.

She had asked her mother once what God wanted with her feet, and her mother had laughed so hard she cried. Julie knew then it was a good prayer. The *Foot Prayer* was for happy nights, and the *Bad Prayer* reflected the family's ever deepening despair.

Julie heard her mother swearing in the background. Bad words for the Bad Prayer. Julie began to sing to drown out the sound. She sang a song for the Baby Jesus.

*Happy birthday to you,
Happy birthday to you,
Happy birthday Baby Jee . . .*

She rocked to the tune, Teddy in her arms, as she tried to banish her parents' *bad* words to oblivion. In the far corner, the shadows moved. One shadow separated from the rest and a dark form stepped away from the

curtains.

"Julie?" Her name floated to her from without her pillow nook. She stopped singing and waited. "Julie?" The voice was deep, soft and soothing.

Julie grabbed her bear, pulling it to her chest. One side of her carefully constructed tent collapsed. The blankets glowed brighter -- the bed radiant in the tenebrous room.

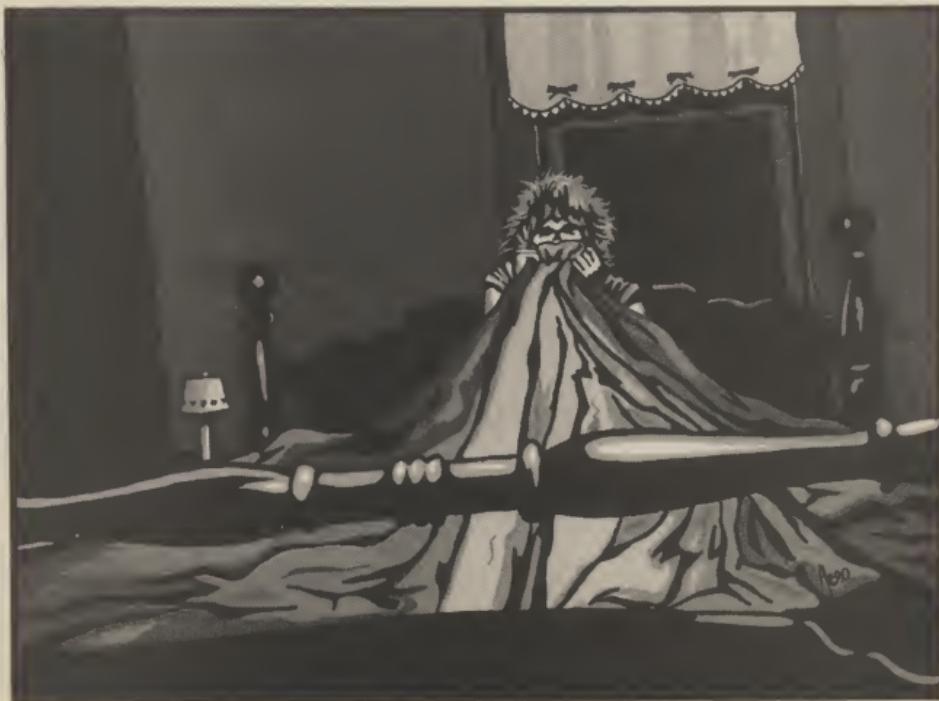
"Jesus?" she whispered. The voice chuckled warmly. Julie dug out from under the covers. The tousled brown head emerged; eyes filled with wonder.

The flashlight lit her face from below, distorting her features. She saw her reflection in the mirror -- ghostly. In the spectral light, her lips twisted into a sneer and her eyes became two black craters, topped by heavy brows. She almost screamed, but again the voice floated melodiously from the shadows. "Julie?"

She turned toward the sound. A handsome man stepped from the gloom. His skin was the color of ivory, his hair jet-black, his eyes soft and gentle. Yet, they burned, red fire. She looked into them and smiled.

A crash came from the living room. Growls grew to shouts, powered by rage. Julie winced.

The man moved closer to the bed. He watched,



sympathetically, and Julie knew that he was a friend. He understood, her confusion, her anguish and her pain. She shifted under his gaze, wanting to rush into protective arms.

"Noisy, aren't they?"

Julie nodded, but didn't seem to hear him. "Who are you?"

"A friend."

"Oh." She fell silent and went back to contemplating her feet. The man moved closer to the bed. Somewhere in the house, something broke as some object, never meant to be a projectile, was propelled against the wall with inhuman fury. The sound of shattering glass almost bell-like. Julie ducked, hiding her head under the pillow.

The man pulled the pillow from her grasp and sat on the edge of the bed. "Are you okay?"

Julie shook her head.

"You're awfully quiet, Julie."

"I'm not supposed to talk to strangers."

"Oh." He sat next to her, looking down at her with sorrowful eyes. She wanted to cry and let out a stifled sob. The man took her hand. "But I'm not a stranger. I already told you, Julie, I'm a friend. I came when I heard your prayer."

But I'm not a stranger. I already told you, Julie, I'm a friend. I came when I heard your prayer . . .

Julie stared. "Really?" She stretched her legs out straight so her feet dangled over the edge of the bed. "Do you like my feet?"

The man laughed. "Yes, I like your feet. They are very nice feet."

"No, I mean do you want my feet?"

He smiled down at her. "No thanks, Julie, you can keep them. You need them."

An explosive expletive turned into a shriek of pain. Julie burrowed into the man's strong, comforting arms.

He patted her shoulder. "Don't listen to them." He considered a moment and asked: "And what would you like for Christmas, little girl?"

She sniffed. "Can you make them stop?"

"It'll stop soon." He hugged her and stroked her hair. "There, there. It's all right. Everything's going to be all right."

She pulled away from him and looked into his fiery eyes. She had heard those words before. It was something adults said when they had nothing else to say, and it was almost always a lie.

As she peered into the impassive face, Julie knew

that he meant it. The fight would stop soon. She sighed. The voices grew louder. She heard the sounds of a scuffle, followed by a loud thud.

"I could kill you, you fucking bitch!"

"Big man! Big, brave man!"

Julie stuffed her fingers in her ears. She stared up at the man, questioning. He had said it would stop. He promised.

The man smiled. "Wait a few minutes," he said as though he had read her thoughts. He held up a hand, index finger extended.

She waited. Silence. She looked at him and grinned. The next thing she heard was bare feet slapping the wooden floorboards, running up the hall toward her room. She cowered, leaning against the man's cool side.

BANG!

Her mouth dropped open; her Adam's apple bobbed up and down in her throat. She emitted a choked mewling sound as she turned in terror to the man. He threw back his head and laughed heartily. She heard another loud report. It reverberated in the now still house. She recognized the sound, familiar even to her tender ears. A gunshot.

Julie gasped, and then the silence was complete.

"They've stopped," he whispered, chuckling softly.

She threw herself from the bed and scrambled for the door on her hands and knees, panting. "Momma?" *It was a trick!* It had to be a trick -- a trick brought by the dark man because she had thought sinful thoughts. She had questioned a prayer.

Her hands sought the doorknob, and it slipped in her sweaty palms. She clawed at it until she found purchase, turning the knob. She pulled the door open and crawled into the hall beyond.

Her mother lay sprawled across the floor surrounded by a scarlet pool -- her back nothing more than a gaping hole, which revealed mangled pink lungs and bits of shattered bone. Her heart quivered convulsively.

Julie looked questioningly into the living room. Her father's hand extended lifelessly beyond the couch. Blood and grey matter decorated the walls, dripping languidly to the floor. The Christmas lights winked cheerfully.

She fell back into her room. "NO!" she howled.

Julie crawled back to the bed and grovelled at the man's feet. "Take it back. I didn't mean it. Take it back. Please, take it back!"

The black man laughed uproariously at some secret joke. He slapped his knee.

"PLEASE! I'm sorry. I'm real sorry."

He sobered. "For what, dear child?" He chuckled her under her chin.

"Cause I'm bad, cause I . . ." She dissolved into tears.

The man looked on. "Cheer up, girl. It's Christmas. Come on, now, on your feet."

She stopped crying. His words awakened some

vestige of hope within her. Of course, *her feet*. Her face filled with beautific light. Julie knew what she must do. She grabbed the knife from the bedside table and half-dragged herself through the room, to the door, talking all the time.

"My feet! If I give them to ya, will you take it back? Please, mister, take it back. Make it like it was before. I don't mind them yelling; really, I don't. Take it back, please mister."

With childlike innocence, she bargained the only way she knew how. An eye for an eye, a tooth for a tooth, a foot for her mother's life.

She swung the knife in a glinting arc, pleading. "If I give you my feet, will you take it back? Take my feet; you can have 'em, just take it back. Please . . ."

Julie heard hollow laughter coming from her room. She turned back to the bed where he had sat. The room was empty. The man gone. The knife fell from nerveless fingers. *Gone*. Julie stuck her thumb in her mouth and sobbed. Then she started to pray.

"If I die before I wake . . . hic . . . I pray the Lord my soul to take . . . hic . . . If I die before I wake . . . hic . . .

I pray the Lord my soul to take . . . hic . . ."

**

The Christmas tree glittered to a blind audience. Its colors ignored, cheering no one. Outside, the sun rose with a flush of joyous color that turned the sky to crimson and then to mauve and gold.

Julie lay curled in a fetal position, her head at her mother's legs, thumb in her mouth. Her skin, unnaturally pale, was polished white despite the flashing lights. Tacky blood dried on the polished wooden floor, no longer flowing from what remained of her tiny, delicate feet. She had bargained and lost. The grisly gift, feet parted from the ankles, pointed at an odd angle toward the ceiling.

The television burst to life, released from its electronic slumber. The harsh static replaced by the lyrics, a Christmas carol to herald this most holy day . . .

God rest ye merry gentlemen, let nothing you dismay.

-- CD

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PROFILES in TERROR

by T. Liam McDonald



F. PAUL WILSON: The Metaphysics of Horror

PHOTO CREDIT: Beth Gwinn



There is an odd phenomena among the middle-age group of horror writers who came to prominence in the 1970s. It might be called "science fictionitis": a strange malady that changes a sci-fi writer into a horror novelist. A combination of elements in the 1950s, such as A.I.P. films, E.C. Comics, Zacherly, the opening of Universal Picture's library of classic horror films, *Famous Monsters*, and the Berkley reprint line of horror fiction created a generation of horror fans and aspiring horror writers who had no market for which to write. Such horror/suspense stalwarts as Dean R. Koontz, Charlie Grant, Dennis Etchison, and many others got their start writing for the science fiction markets, in many cases because that was as close as they could get to their beloved field of dark fantasy and horror.

Among these writers is F. Paul Wilson, who probably had more success in science fiction than many of the others before finally striking out as a horror novelist with one of the classic novels of the 80's: *The Keep*. Not a bad debut at all for what David Schow would disparagingly call a "busted sci-fi writer."

In the decade since *The Keep*,

Wilson has created a body of work that he is currently tying together with a trilogy of novels (starting with *Reborn*) into a kind of "F. Paul Wilson Myths." This is not surprising coming from an author who has maintained consistency in the metaphysical underpinnings of his work. A Paul Wilson book or story always works on a number of levels, and no matter what horrible things may be happening to the characters physically, something much worse is always tearing them apart on a deeper, more metaphysical level, making physical pain seem almost preferable.

Francis Paul Wilson was born on May 17, 1946 in Jersey City, New Jersey, and lived in Hackensack for the early part of his life. His father had come to America as a penniless British immigrant who quickly embraced the capitalist system and became a high-placed executive. His mother's family was of rural New England stock, and both parents were raised in a strict Catholic environment which they duplicated in their own household. Church every Sunday, catechism class, parochial education, C.Y.O., the whole nine yards. He even met his wife, Mary, on a C.Y.O. bus trip in 1961.

In sixth grade, Paul was taken out of public schools and shipped off to the nuns to be educated, where he had a brief period of adaptation:

I was a really precocious reader. I did my book report on Frederick Brown's *Martians Go Home* and they looked at me like I was the Martian. The nuns couldn't understand that I was reading paperbacks. I was never an outsider; my friends were always the 'in' crowd. I managed to be able to hold my own with the tough kids, but I also got A's and read a lot. I've never been a very self-conscious or self-examining person. My father was a real achiever who expected good marks from all his children, so we got them. I just thought that was the way things were: you do your best, and there's no question that you'd want to do *other*

than your best. That's probably why I produce as much as I do nowadays. It's in the genes, in the cells."

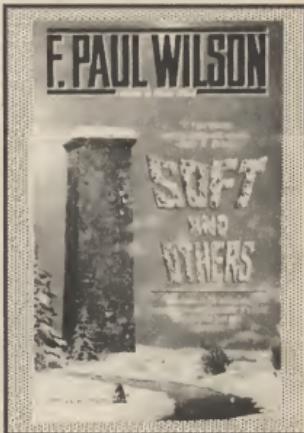
Like so many horror writers of Wilson's generation, he was strongly influenced by the E.C. Comics that his father forbid him to read. "I was allowed to read Uncle Scrooge and Mickey Mouse and Donald Duck. But when I'd go down to the store with my dime to buy the new Uncle Scrooge, I'd see these other comics with a guy holding a severed head and a bloody axe. Cool! Pretty soon my dimes were going to them, and I'd hide them in my friend's garage. I never took them seriously. The fact that they became forbidden fruit really locked me in on horror. We are formed by our childhood. There are certain neural pathways to our pleasure centers that are formed in certain ways. I had a taste for that sort of bizarre thing. Maybe there's something antisocial in it, too. I don't know. But there was an epiphany of some sort there with those Wally Wood flying saucers and Al Williamson dinosaurs. You're too young to orgasm, but it's equivalent."

The first real monster movie he saw was *The Beast From 20,000 Fathoms* which fed his fascination with dinosaurs and monsters. He had begged his parents to take him to see it, but the Polio scares of that era kept them out of the theatres. They finally had to take me to the Tom's River Drive-In. The movie didn't scare me, but coming home over the old bridge, I kept expecting the monster to jump out of the water and snatch the car."

The fiction bug bit early, and in the first grade he wrote his first short story, about a haunted house. "I can look back now and think that's when I really decided I wanted to become a writer. We had a reading circle and I asked the teacher if I could read my story. I hadn't finished it, but I had gotten to the part where they go into the haunted house. So when I'd read all that I'd written I just started winging it and trying to make it up as I went along. The teacher

caught on and told me to finish it and come back to tell us the rest. As we were moving the chairs back, the kids were coming up and asking me 'What happened in the story? What happened?' And I'm thinking 'I've got 'em! They're really hooked!' It was a great feeling. They wanted more, and that's the highest compliment to a story teller: 'Tell me more.' I think that's when I got the bug.

"Horror fiction was not all that available. Poe didn't really happen for me. Except for *"The Cask of Amontillado,"* it was too psychological, and I wanted vampires and werewolves. Science fiction wound up being a poor substitute. If there weren't any monsters available, then I'd settle for rocket ships."



But it was always horror that held the most appeal. He clearly remembers the first time he saw a classic scene from a Val Lewton film at age 12: "The most disturbing thing I've ever seen in a movie was the scene in *The Leopard Man* where the little girl is being pursued by the shadow and her mother won't let her in. Then the blood seeps under the door. The lesson of that scene has never left me. I imagined worse things happening to that child than Lewton and Tourneur could have ever shown me. I tried it in *The Tomb* with the rakkishi. I never really give a

good description of them. I let people fill in their own details as to what is scary and horrible about them. It's not that easy to do without being obvious, but I do think the readers can fill in more gruesome details than I can, because they're going to put in what's horrible to *them*.

"In the new book I just finished, the sequel to *Reborn*, there is a scene that I really needed to do that was *very* unpleasant. A mutilation scene. I found that I was having an aversion reaction to my keyboard. I *had* to write it because I was trying to break the spirit of one of my character's, and awful things have to happen to break this man. I loathed the scene, so I wrote it oblique. It's still an awful, awful scene. You mustn't distance yourself from your writing if you want to make it real. I don't get off on really graphic stuff. I've read books that delight in flaying children alive. Physical horror is not what gets to me, it's the more metaphysical type of horror (what's being done to your soul, what's being done to your spirit) that I find the most frightening. Being graphic is not that bad in and of itself (I did it to the max in "Pelts"), but it has to work on a second level for me."

Wilson can also cite his reading of Ray Bradbury's *The October Game* as a crucial moment in his development as a horror writer:

"That story really poleaxed me. That's when I knew I really wanted to write horror fiction. I wanted to do to somebody what Bradbury did to me. What power! Even after you're dead someone is going to read that story and their adrenalin is going to flow and you will have affected somebody's physiology from beyond the grave. It's a form of immortality. After Bradbury, Richard Matheson's *Shock* series came out and that also made a big impression.

"The first Lovecraft I read was 'The Thing on the Doorstep,' which had all those words I hadn't heard of, all those great descriptions. Plus the other reality he depicted, the chaos outside that interfaces with our own

reality and sometimes breakthrough. That there are things that are lost to human history, that we don't know about. I think, to one extent or another, Lovecraft has colored everything I have done in horror. What he gave me was the idea that you could have an *external* evil, a more metaphysical evil, one outside of the Judeo-Christian mythology. In my mythos, the *real* evil is what hides behind our common mythology, which is how we have interpreted this other evil to make it more palatable to us. Because if you really saw what was behind the wall you would go stark raving mad. We can't quite see it, but it's awful. And it's hungry. And it's much worse than Satan, who is merely our way of viewing something awful to help us deal with what's *really* out there."

He attended Xavier High School, a Catholic military school in New York City, because his best friend went there and because he thought the uniforms were cool. "It was one of the great experiences of my life," he recalls. "I grew up in a way I wouldn't have grown up in Hackensack, on the street. I became an urban kid, it broadened my outlook and I learned how to handle myself. But it was also a different New York. There wasn't that much racial tension at the time. Times Square was more naughty than sleazy. Now it's very grim and sleazy. There was more pride in New Yorkers. There are so many people now who don't think that anything is beneath them. 'If you can't hold onto it, then it's mine' is the common attitude. I never really felt insecure back then. Now, I wouldn't go to 168th Street with an armed guard."

When high school was finished and the time came to pick a career path, the choice became clear. "I never thought I could make a living being a writer. The idea that someone would actually pay me money to write stories I would write for free wasn't real to me. It was a hobby, not something I could support my family with. Plus the market for my tastes

wasn't all that great. I was always interested in science, and my father was a frustrated doctor. He never could afford to go to medical school, so he always wanted me to go. I think he pushed me towards medicine. Having a natural bent for science, I went to Georgetown University's pre-med program towards the end of becoming a physician.

"I took a class in Greek Drama there, and had a very laconic, laid-back professor who always looked like he'd just rolled out of bed; a type of dissolute, Patrician Southerner. He taught me the structure of Greek drama, the idea of catharsis. That's another one of those building blocks that I can look back on and see why I write like I do. The idea of catharsis, that you build up tensions, maybe letting off little bits of steam here and there, but you keep on building and building and then you blow it all off at the end. Then I think you've satisfied the demands of drama in that you have built up tension and relieved it. The audience goes out the door feeling they've had an *experience*. I am not satisfied in writing a book or even a story that does not do that."

Today, he looks with great fondness at his Georgetown years as "some of the best years of my life. I was very much at home in Washington. It was such an exciting time in terms of the intellectual life, which is something that I see is so lacking in my daughter's generation. There does not seem to be any intellectual interest in anything today. We students were very interested in ideas, and the Jesuits were very interested in ideas. I've said before that they taught me how to think and question, and so I questioned myself right out of the church by age 18. Nothing was above question to them, not even the Pope. When I saw that, it kind of inspired me.

"I wound up, after a lot of thinking, finding that I don't really believe in God. I think the biggest belief has to be in yourself, and that sounds so corny and so trite, but it is true. Self-esteem is a big part of believing in

yourself, and if you don't believe in yourself, then I suppose you have to make up something else to believe in.

"I don't see any need to resort to a God for a code of honor, a code of ethics, a code of behavior. I think you can rationally arrive at a moral code that allows you to live with other people in a productive life. I can't think of any need for a God, or any reason to believe in God. The whole idea of a provident God is ludicrous. Prayer is a cruel hoax."

pletely, but their commitment was inspiring. They were committed to ideas, they were committed to people and the civil rights movement. There was no bullshit, no hypocrisy with them. They were very real, valid people to me. It was also a very exciting time intellectually and musically. We used to go down to the cafes on M Street, where I saw bands like the *Mugwumps*, half of which went on to become *The Mamas and The Papas*, while the other half

more to say to me. So I had Ayn Rand going in one ear, and Kierkegaard, Camus, and their set going in the other. I was taken by objectivism, which hooked me up with the libertarian wing of the Y.A.F. [Young Americans for Freedom, a radical conservative offshoot of the Young Republicans]. They ruffled feathers left and right. The YAFers wanted complete free speech, complete free economy, no draft, et cetera. I mostly stood on the sidelines and watched because I was apolitical basically, as most objectivists were. (If you voted, it was for *None Of The Above*).

"I was a real hardass libertarian for a long time. But you mellow. You get older and see that things aren't so black and white. You see a lot of things that don't seem to have any solution, so you step back and say 'Well, alright, I don't have all the answers, though I thought I did. I only have the answers for me.' But it was such an intellectually exciting time. And I don't see kids today getting into their heads like that."

Once finished with his education, he got involved with a group medical practice that made him a very good offer and provided the security he felt he needed. "It's probably one of the best things that could have happened to me because it gives me time to write. If I was on my own or a specialist, my time wouldn't be my own. I would always have a beeper attached to me. This way, there's always someone to cover for me."

One might think that, as one of the most successful writers in the genre today, Wilson might have retired from medicine by now.

"My writing is enough to support us for now," he explains, "but I don't know how long I can sustain this level of output. I've been very, very prolific lately. Plus, I love medicine. There are parts of it I hate. I hate the government intrusion, I hate the paperwork, but I do get a lot of pleasure out of my practice. The medicine keeps me fresh for the writing, and vice versa. When I come home from the office I'm anxious to



Wilson is quick to add, however, that he owes a lot to his Jesuit education. "I benefited enormously from the whole Jesuit experience. I learned how to think and organize my thoughts and take perspective on something. They were extraordinary people. They would sit around and bullshit with you in the cafeteria. They weren't aloof. Some of the younger ones would curse and swear with the best of them. I disagreed with their social ideas almost com-

pletely. I became *The Loving Spoonful*. A guy in my class co-wrote "Country Roads" with John Denver. That's what it was like. There was so much going on, it was a great time.

"I found that I didn't have to go to church every Sunday because there was no one to tell me to go. I also discovered Ayn Rand. *The Fountainhead* and *Atlas Shrugged* opened my eyes tremendously to human potential and a whole new way of looking at things. The existentialists had even

write. If I didn't have the writing, I'd be one very unhappy doctor. You peak and plateau in group practice within three years, and I can just see myself, coming from my over-achiever household, saying 'Is that all there is?' I would have either gone on to specialize, or gone solo (which would probably end up wrecking my marriage) if I didn't have the writing."

Early in his writing career he produced a number of science fiction stories, elements of which were later adapted for the novels *Healer*, *Wheels Within Wheels*, *The Tery*, and *Enemy of the State*. This early writing was almost completely in science fiction, and reflects the ideas he was exposed to in college. "It's very libertarian. They even gave me the first Prometheus Award [for *Wheels Within Wheels*]. I took free market economics (the whole *laissez faire* concept) and treated it as an alien philosophy. I figured no one had ever seen this or been taught this in school, so I used it as my background and set things in a *laissez faire* based society. It was really socio-economic fiction, not science fiction, but it found a market."

There finally came a point, however, when Wilson just didn't have any more science fiction to write. "I had said pretty much what I wanted to say in *The Tery* and the three novels. I'd also painted myself into a corner. At Lunarcion, someone introduced me as 'the libertarian sf writer,' and I said if that's how I'm being perceived, it's time for a change. By then, I had shot my load in science fiction, and the time was right. The horror field (this was '79) was opening up. King was on his way up, there was a market, and this was my first love. I realized it was time to write my horror novel. Actually, my first two books were not novels, they were cobbled together things, because I didn't think I could write a whole novel. *Enemy of the State* is my first real novel, and that showed me that I could do it.

"I went to my agent Al Zuckerman with a couple of ideas and asked

him which one he thought I should do, and he sat there and looked at them and said 'How about this one, the World War II story set in this castle in Romania.' I still hadn't figured everything out with it, but one night as I'm lying in bed the similarity between a cross and the hilt of a sword hit me. You see, I did not want this to be a vampire novel . . . the evil was supposed to be *worse* than a vampire. But then why would it be afraid of a cross? It was killing me, because I wanted it to be afraid of something that looks like a cross, and I was racking my mind. Then it occurred to me that if you put a little nubbin at the top of the hilt of a sword and . . . holy shit. The whole thing came together. I decided to take two characters out of "Demonsong" [a short story published in *Heroic Fantasy*] and bring them back to the present. I was reading a lot of Ludlum at the time, so there's a definite Ludlum atmosphere in *The Keep* as well."

When *The Keep* was published in the early eighties it became a bestseller and a cult classic, and broke Paul out as one of the major horror novelists of the decade. Its evocative gothic atmosphere and World War II setting proved to be the perfect combination against which Wilson could tell his story of an eternal battle between two huge, incomprehensible opposing forces.

"Our ally force is not a force for good per se. It doesn't necessarily want the best for us. It's just fighting over turf. It's not trying to protect us so much as it has always fought the enemy force. The enemy *does* want to hurt us because it gets something out of pain. In my mythos, we create our own good and we create our own evil, but there's something out there that feeds on that evil. And wants more of it.

"I think Glaeken is a decent man. He may have started out as more of a mercenary, but in his battle against all the evil that Rasalom has done over the centuries he has become a force for good in the sense

that he loathes Rasalom and wants to stop him. In the *Reborn* novels he's very tired and wants out. He does not want any part of this battle. He just wants to finish his last few years in peace. In the *Reborn* series we are on our own, the ally force is gone, though Rasalom doesn't know it."

Wilson had a lot of hopes for the movie version of *The Keep*, directed by Michael "Miami Vice" Mann, but those hopes were soon dashed when the film wound up being only a faint shadow of its source material. It was boring, incomprehensible, and stupid to boot. As Joe Lansdale has said, it "was filmed with all the love and consideration a hound dog gives a rabbit it's mangling." That pretty much sums it up.

"A very successful movie puts you on the map," Wilson notes, "and it gives you a lot more latitude in what you're writing, like it did with Stephen King and Peter Straub. *The Tomb* would have been a much bigger seller if *The Keep* had been even a moderate success as a movie, and it would have been a movie too. It's been optioned a couple of times, but because of the failure of *The Keep* no one wanted to put the large amount of money into it that it needed."

The Keep was followed by *The Tomb*, a novel that dealt with a clash of cultures and codes of honor. Repairman Jack, a mercenary type "fix-it" man, is drawn into the Indian Bahkti family when he agrees to help Kusum Bahkti recover an important family heirloom: a necklace that all members of their family wear, and that keeps them young. But Kusum is a religious fanatic who is in America to fulfill an ancient vow. He has brought along the rakoshi, monsters that his family has protected for generations, as a means to this end.

"My title for the book was *Rakoshi*. Berkley didn't get a reshash of *The Keep* but they wanted it to look and sound like *The Keep*, so they told me that there was 'retailer resistance' to my title and convinced me to allow them to rename it *The Tomb*. I told them there wasn't a

tomb in the whole damn book. They said, 'Don't worry. No one will care.' And they were right."

Paul is quick to cite his next novel, *The Touch*, as one of his most personal books. The story of a family doctor Alan Bulmer who has the *dat-tay-vao* (the power to heal), passed onto him by a dying bum, marks Wilson's only venture into the medical thriller. *The Touch* is told with the deep sensitivity and profound humanity that marks the best of Wilson's work. Dr. Bulmer comes vividly to life as his wish for some way to cure the incurable becomes a curse that devours him. Yet he persists in using the *dat-tay-vao* at a risk to his own life and sanity. "There's probably a bit of idealized self in Alan Bulmer," Wilson concedes. "I'm not as selfless as he is."

"I never wanted to write a medical book, I never wanted to be another Robin Cook. I write to get away from medicine. This is my golf game. But I would be in the office with a sick patient and I would just wish... a lot of things in that book are true, like the fifteen year old girl who never made it to her prom because of leukemia. I carried her around for a long time in my mind. You just wish sometimes you could go over there and touch them and make it better."

He also dealt with healing in his science fiction, like the psyonics from his first novel, *Healer*, in which the mind of his series character (Steven Dalt) is invaded by a creature named an *alaret*. Dalt and the creature (who he nicknames "Pard") soon develop a bond, and the creature gives Dalt the power to heal the minds of people affected by "the horrors," a mysterious dementia afflicting people randomly.

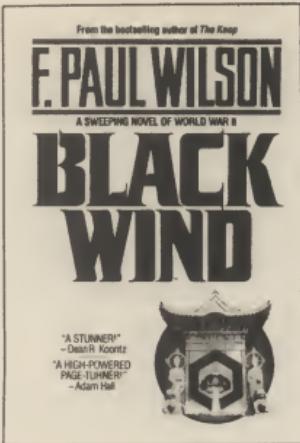
"Healing has always held a fascination for me. The limitations of medicine can be so frustrating. People in pain you can't do anything for, unnamed syndromes which we can't treat because we don't know what causes them, so many people who are mentally incapacitated because of anxiety and fears. *Healer* dealt with

more of the psychological type of healing, while *The Touch* was the other hand, the physical. I wrote *Healer* in my first year of practice, so I hadn't seen that much. But *The Touch* was seeded by wish fulfill-

ment to turn them into sequels because I liked the idea of tying all six books together. As I've been writing these books through the years, that background of the evil hiding *out there* has been a consistent subtext. Somehow the *dat-tay-vao* taps into it, and the necklaces from *The Tomb* are somehow connected. I'm pretty amazed at the way it all works out because I didn't have it planned this way. Everything dovetails so nicely, there must be something unconscious working here."

While *Black Wind*, Wilson's revisionist World War II story, can be called his "lost book" since not many people read it, it is generally considered his finest, most fully realized work. *"Black Wind"* was a terrible flop as a hardcover. They shipped a lot of copies, and Tor got behind the book one hundred percent, but the public just didn't buy. Every review was good, but there weren't many of them." Possibly the fact that it was not clearly a "genre" book had something to do with this, since book buyers and booksellers had to somehow pigeonhole everything that is published into "horror" or "thriller" or "espionage" or whatever. While *Black Wind* may not have a definable slot, it is an extraordinary book that captivates the reader with its epic story of two boys, one a Japanese sent by his politician father to learn Western ways in America, the other a young white boy, who we follow as the world moves closer to war. The depiction of the two clashing cultures, the fine characterization, the epic sweep of the World War II background, and the hint of the supernatural all combine to make this a truly uncommon, fascinating, and wholly successful book.

The latest series of novels from Wilson is the trilogy that begins with *Reborn*, in which the evil killed in *The Keep* is being reborn into the world in 1968 (the date of Wilson's graduation from Georgetown). Glaeken, now an old man, is also back, though he refuses to participate in the coming battle. *Reborn* is



ment. Then the plot started cooking, and I thought 'What would happen? What would that waiting room look like if people found out?' It finally demanded to be written."

Wilson admits that he doesn't decide when to write a book, the books decide when to be written:

"I don't have a game plan of how my career is going to go. It would be nice if I did. I wouldn't have written *The Keep* so early, but then again *The Keep* wouldn't have been the book it was if it were written later on. I was less self-conscious then. It might be less of a gonzo horror novel if I did it now. I'm happy with the way things are, but I could have used more of a crescendo effect in terms of the order of the books. Everyone wanted me to do another *Keep* at first, but I didn't have another *Keep* to do. When I do a book I milk that subject, and I can't do sequels. The ones I'm doing now that are called sequels really aren't. They're books that were going to stand alone, but I

permeated with vivid Catholic imagery, and its central character, Father Bill Ryan, is a Jesuit priest. "These are images I've been carrying around for years. I'm a recovering Catholic. I still have tremendous respect for priests, even though I don't believe in what they believe. To devote your life to teaching and celibacy and poverty and so on is impressive to me. The depiction of Father Ryan is a tip of my hat to those Jesuits who helped shape me. I'm going to do some awful things to him, but it's a tribute to his strength and character that all these awful things are necessary in order to break him. This is not a guy who buckles easily."

For Wilson, his definable fears are more metaphysical than visceral: "Loss of your self. You've lost control over what you're doing or who you want to be or what you are. You are less than you could be and you realize it. You're doing things you hate. That's my real, I guess you could say, 'metaphysical' fear."

As for the horror genre in general, Paul thinks it is "still a bastard child. It's still gutter fiction and that is all for the good. I'd like to see it remain gutter fiction, because I think that's where the vitality comes from. Some stuff is too mannered for its own good, and some seems obscure for the sake of obscurity. There are writers who are too 'arms-length' in their fiction, and I don't think that you can be in this field. But that's my personal taste. There's room for every style in horror. Whatever works.

"I don't write about horror you can find in the newspaper. You're going to pay five or six bucks for one of my books, and I want you to read something that you're not going to read in the paper. Rape, incest, et cetera, . . . you can read about those without my help. I want to take you somewhere the newspaper can't take you, where your real life can't take you. I think that's the purpose of fiction: to take you places you cannot go in real life. That's my job."

The upcoming year will see quite a bit from F. Paul Wilson. *Healer*, *Wheels Within Wheels*, and *Enemy of The State* are all being republished by Baen books. The next two *Reborn* books, *Reprisals* and *Nightworld* (which will probably have their titles changed) will be coming out from Dark Harvest and Berkley Books, along with *Sibs*, a psychological police thriller. "I think *Sibs* is going to be one of my best, and that a lot of people are going to react to it very strongly. It came on like a fever. I wrote *Sibs* in nine-and-a-half weeks."

Upcoming short stories are "Topsy" (*Obsessions*), "Bob Dylan, Troy Jonson and the Speed Green" (*Shock Rock*), "Dreams" (*The Ultimate Frankenstein*), and three more Repairman Jack stories: "The Last Rakosh" (The World Fantasy Convention Program Book), "Home Repairs" (*ColdBlood*), and "The Long Way Home" (in Joe R. Lansdale's dark suspense anthology). Plus, Axolotl Press will be publishing a limited edition of his Catholic vampire novella "Midnight Mass," and Bill Munster's Footsteps Press will be releasing a chapbook of a powerful new story called "Pelts," illustrated by Jill Bauman, with proceeds going to Friends For Animals. In addition, "Pelts" has been adapted by Wilson to a one-act play as part of "Screamplay," a Grand-Guignol-type production (with material by Joe R. Lansdale and others) by The Human Theatre Company, scheduled for off-broadway this Fall at The Astor Place Theatre, New York. Wilson has also designed the setting for the second Horror Writer's of America shared-world anthology, *Freakshow*, set in the circus world.

All this and family medicine, too. — CD

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TALK DIRTY TO ME

BARRY HOFFMAN is a multi-talented inner-city teacher from Pennsylvania. Not only does Hoffman publish/edit the acclaimed censorship publication, *Gauntlet*; he has sold his fiction and non-fiction to various magazines and anthologies, including *Cold Blood*, *Noctulpa*, *The Tome*, *Mystery Scene*, *Castle Rock*, and *Horrorstruck*. Hoffman should be familiar to *Cemetery Dance* readers; he appeared in our premiere issue!

"One ringee-dingee." He waited, stretched out on his bed.

"Two ringee-dingee." Come on, Sheila, he thought.

"Three ringee . . ." The phone was picked up.

"Hello," she said, tentatively.

"Hi, Sheila, it's me." He relaxed, his fingers gently stroking the lace on the red panties he wore.

"Oh God," she said. "Why won't you leave me alone?"

"Don't ask questions! You know the rules. You don't want me to get angry, do you, Sheila?"

Silence. Three . . . four . . . five seconds. She surrendered -- again. "No."

He had twenty, maybe thirty seconds. She wouldn't interrupt again unless he asked her a question. She'd be quick about it, too -- if she knew what was good for her.

"Are you in your panties? The red ones?"

"Yes," she whispered.

"And matching bra?" He toyed with his own red bra, the 38D cups stuffed with foam.

"Yes." She was sobbing now.

"You see, I know everything, Sheila. I bet you wonder how I know."

Simple, he thought. So damned simple. He had stalked her for more than a month. She hadn't kept her shades closed, then. Monday, without fail, it was the red undergarments; Tuesday, white; Wednesday -- hump day, the toughest day of the week for working people -- black; and so on. A creature of habit, his Sheila. She must have been brought up in a very regimented household, he mused. He'd have to ask her about it one day.

Once he'd determined the unvarying pattern he began his calls -- terrifying her with his knowledge.

"Now suck your thumb, Sheila." He could imagine her resisting. Just a little tug now. "Don't make me mad. I can get in whenever I want." A lie. "Two or three weeks from now, when you least expect it. Rape you. Roll my tongue over your body. Cut you . . . cut your pretty face,

after I'm done with you. You don't want that, do you Sheila?"

He heard her heavy breathing. Felt her fear flow through the phone. It pumped him up. He had an erection. Only five more seconds. "Do it, Sheila. Do it NOW! Put your goddamned thumb in your mouth and suck." He knew she would. "Keep it there for five minutes after I hang up. Not a second less. I'll know. You know I'll know."

He hung up. Forty-five seconds -- not near enough time to trace him.

He had half-an-hour before he'd call again. Plenty of time. He reluctantly removed the bra and caressed the silky smoothness of it. Put it in the drawer, in its proper place, with his other goodies. The tools of his trade. He smiled at the thought. His tools . . . his trade. He would have liked to wear the bra, but he didn't want to draw undue attention to himself. He kept on the panties, though. Dressed, he drove the three miles to Sixteenth Street to one of his many pay phones.

"One ringee-dingee. Two ringee . . ."

"Yes."

"Good girl. Waiting breathlessly for my call?"

She knew better than to respond. Dreaded what would come next.

"Take off your bra. Don't waste my time, now. Touch them . . . lightly, like a spider weaving his web. Good girl. A little harder, now. Don't forget the nipples. We don't want to forget the nipples, do we Sheila? Squeeze them . . . hard. Don't hurt yourself, though." He looked at his watch. Time to go. "You've been a good girl, tonight. You can go to bed now. No more calls."

He hung up. He could picture her holding the phone, crying. Did she believe him? She couldn't be sure. He was so damn unpredictable. Sometimes he lied for it heightened her terror. Made her sleep on edge, waiting for the phone to ring. The thought pleased him. Sheila waiting . . . waiting for him. Thinking of him . . . in bed. He wouldn't call again tonight. Vary the pattern. Always vary the pattern. He went home; went to bed; slept soundly. Pleasant dreams . . . such very pleasant dreams.

**

Sheila cradled the phone to her breasts, sobbing bitterly. It was like she had been raped . . . violated. She felt so humiliated, so defenseless. He knew everything



about her. Knew if she complied. Knew if she balked at his demands. She felt his presence in the room and lurched. She ran to the bathroom and threw up. It wasn't the first time. She slipped into her teri-cloth robe and replaced the phone in its cradle. Shivered. Wouldn't do to have the phone off the hook if he *did* call again. She had tried that before and he had punished her -- unmercifully.

Later she lay in bed -- waiting. She tried to blot him out of her mind but couldn't. Every sound was magnified. Sounds of his presence. Was he in her apartment looking at her? Impossible, she knew, but the thought lingered like a bad headache. The walls had eyes. Yes, they did. He'd call . . . just when she'd drift off to sleep. He'd know. He'd wait and call just when she finally shut her eyes.

Hours later exhaustion finally overwhelmed her and she slept. She dreamt of a wall of eyes peering at her every move. Eyes that followed her wherever she went. Eyes when she undressed; when she went to the bathroom; when she bathed. Eyes . . . beady little eyes. Watching . . . always watching . . . watching her.

**

It began as a lark thirteen years before. Roger, then sixteen, was entertaining three of his friends. Not really friends, because they didn't particularly like him. As long as he treated them to movies, pizza, beer and the like they'd tolerate him, though. Tonight they were guzzling his mother's scotch, while she was visiting a sick friend. Having a good time. Tony suggested the obscene call.

"Let's call Rita Bavaro. Poor girl, just broke up with Mark Langello. Probably horny as hell."

They had.

"Hi Rita." It was Tony.

"Who is this?"

"If you're nice I'll let you suck my dick."

"I'm going to hang up." But, she didn't. It was vulgar and disgusting, but she kind of enjoyed it. With her parents out and shitface Mark probably making it with Carla Linden, she'd been sulking. She'd play along -- try to find out who it was. Now another boy had the phone.

"You can suck mine when you're done with him."

"I'll need a magnifying glass to find it -- maybe a telescope." Rita couldn't help herself. She knew she was playing into their hands, but damn if she wasn't getting turned on -- just a bit.

Now a third boy. "Come on over and you can have us all. One at a time or all at once. Your choice." Raucous laughter.

Now another. This one tentative. "You want to, uh, you know, get down and dirty?"

An unmistakable nasal voice. Like he had a stuffed nose. Rita recognized it instantly.

"Go fuck yourself, Roger. It's the only one you'll

ever get." Pleased with herself, she hung up.

Roger stared into the receiver as the others roared.

"She got you, man."

"You're in deep shit, now."

"She'll have the cops over in ten minutes."

It was one great joke, the after effects of which lasted through another bottle of his mother's ample supply of liquor.

It wasn't a big joke to Roger. While they laughed and horsed around Roger heard Rita's voice.

Go fuck yourself... only one... only one... only one you'll ever get. It had turned him on. No girl had ever talked to him like that. Hell, girls hardly ever talked to him at all. But, Rita had talked dirty to him. He was pumped. As soon as he could, he got rid of his rowdy friends and went to bed, replaying the conversation in his mind -- over and over again, while he played with himself.

Soon after, he began to make calls on his own . . . by himself. He didn't really say anything, at first. He feared his tell-tale voice would give him away. He'd call girls in his class and breathe heavy . . . while he played with himself. They'd hang up on him. Not all right away, though. Some seemed to get a thrill listening to him and let it go on for thirty or forty seconds. Embarrassed at the pleasure it brought they'd finally hang up. Humiliated. Roger loved it.

He wanted more, though. He'd had a taste. He wanted the whole bottle.

He stole Chip Banks's little black book. One of the choice studs in school, Chip had girls all over the city. The book became Roger's bible. He called girls who didn't go to his school -- girls who wouldn't instantly recognize his voice. He'd ask for Laura or Dawn or Joy and say every foul thought he'd repressed. Things he was sure his friends were doing. The girls would curse him, but they didn't hang up immediately. That really pumped him up.

"Talk dirty to me," he'd say after their tirade. "I like it when you talk dirty to me."

They'd curse him some more. He was amazed how many girls took the bait instead of just hanging up. Stupid . . . they were such idiots. Or, maybe they enjoyed it as much as he did. Were they playing with themselves while they cursed him out?

"Come on, Kristel, talk dirty to me."

"I like it when you're angry."

"That sounds impossible! We could try if you want."

"Yeah, talk dirty to me."

He got his kicks. They got theirs. *Nobody* got hurt. And, Mama wouldn't like it. That was best of all.

Mama. How he'd loved her . . . how he loathed her, now.

Mama, who clothed him in silk panties and dresses when he was three. Roger became the daughter who had died at birth.

Mama, who kept him cloistered in the house until

first grade. He was a doll to be dressed and groomed -- unable to develop an identity of his own.

Mama, who ignored him and all but abandoned him when he started school. No longer Mama's best girl, she had no use for him.

Mama, who couldn't love him for what he was. The more he craved her affection the stronger she denied his existence.

How he'd loved Mama . . . how he loathed her, now. Without any preparation, he was tossed into a world completely alien to anything he'd experienced. It went without saying he had difficulty making friends. The other boys talked about their homes, parents, brothers, sisters, shared secrets. He remained on the fringes, taking everything in, offering nothing. He could never share *his* secret. He'd never hear the end of it if he did.

So Roger bought friends. No, he bought companionship.

He didn't need them anymore, though. Ma Bell brought him all the pleasure face-to-face contact made impossible. He had all the girls he wanted. He just let his fingers do the walking.

"Talk dirty to me."

They did.

Like a junkie he craved more -- a stronger more powerful high. He was bothered that, like Mama, these girls controlled him. When they tired of him, they hung up. He'd call back and they'd hang up immediately. Some even threatened to call the police. Cock teasers -- all of them. Strung him along then cast him adrift. Like mama, they'd ignore him -- cut him out of their life.

He wouldn't let it happen, again. No, *he'd* pull the strings. They'd answer to him and him alone. Cross him and they'd incur his wrath.

**

It hadn't come easily, but over a ten-year period he had honed his craft. He was a virtuoso with the phone, his instrument. He planned . . . schemed . . . worked out every detail.

Over the last three years he had perfected his stalking technique. He'd watch the women as they came out of office buildings at five o'clock, looking for one who wasn't part of the crowd. One with flowing brown hair . . . like Mama; a girl with meat on her -- not fat, mind you, but a woman of substance . . . like Mama; a woman whose clothes, whose walk, whose demeanor emanated inner strength tinged with sadness . . . like Mama.

He'd follow her for weeks . . . discretely, at a distance. He had all the time in the world. He'd locate her building; then her floor; finally her apartment. Her phone number? No problem. There were all sorts of ways of getting phone numbers. Jasmine, his first, had hers right in the phone book. He didn't call. Not yet. He

wasn't ready. Not by a long shot. He watched her coming-and-goings and patterns emerged. Like a giant jigsaw puzzle the pieces slowly came together to form a whole.

Jasmine lived on the third floor. Up at 6:15 Monday through Friday, to bed right after the news at 11:30. She kept her blinds up, silly bitch, while she changed for bed at 11:00. White panties and bra. Always white, except on the weekends. As if liberated from the drudgery of her secretarial job she changed to red underwear Friday when she got home. She wore red on Saturday, as well. Sunday, another dreary week approaching, she'd change back to white. She seldom dated and never had a man stay the night. Poor Jasmine, Roger thought, poor lonely Jasmine. Time for some company.

He established contact -- a Friday, 6:15, after she got home from work and changed into her red underwear.

"One ringee-dingee." He lay in bed, clad in only panties and bra -- like Jasmines'.

"Two ringee . . ."

"Hello."

"Hi Jasmine."

"Who is it? Is that you, Jeff?"

"I like your red bra and panties so much more than the white. Don't you?"

"How? . . . Who the hell are you? How . . . how . . . ?"

"Jasmine, I know all about you. We're going to be great friends."

"You're sick, do you know that. A fucking pervert." She hung up.

Roger expected as much. It was going to be a long night. A wonderfully long night.

"One ringee-dingee."

"Hello." Tentative.

"You shouldn't have done that, Jasmine. You'll make me angry. You don't want to make me angry."

"Look, I don't know--"

He cut her short. "I was in your apartment today." A lie. Keep her off balance to keep her on the line. "I was going to take a pair of your red panties and send them to you in the mail. You don't want to get me mad, Jasmine. One day I could be in your apartment when you get home. You know what I could do. Tell me, Jasmine, what could I do?"

Silence. Stunned, shocked, not calm and calculated. She hung up. Didn't slam the phone down, though. Roger laughed . . . then played with himself.

It took a month before she relented. Roger didn't mind. He liked them feisty. Jasmine was a fighter . . . a survivor. She hung up on him sixteen times the first night before she took the phone off the hook. She couldn't keep it off for long, however. You don't know how dependent you are on your telephone until you're denied access.

Sunday morning, when he called, she'd replaced it. She invariably went to bed at 1:00 after *Saturday Night Live*. She put on her nightgown during the endless commercials at 12:45. He had walked up and down her street from 7:00 through 9:00 and knew she had no date.

"One ringee-dingee."

"Hello." He caught the caution in her voice.

"You don't know how that red bra turns me on."

Silence. He could feel her mind reeling in horror.

"You've got it off, now, don't you?" A calculated gamble.

More silence. She was breathing heavily. He was right.

"You admire them when you look in the mirror. Too many women go to fat when they get your age. Not that you're old -- thirty-two's not old."

She gasped. *How?* he could hear her think. How could he know?

Simple. He'd made a phone call to her employer checking up on a credit card application. He couldn't quite make out the date of birth and had to get a reference anyway. They were more than cooperative. Told him how long she worked there, her previous employer -- all kinds of useful tidbits.

"It's going to the health club twice a week that keeps you fit."

"How? . . . Who? . . ." She was blubbering now, her mind overloaded by his intimate knowledge.

"They're big, but they don't sag. I like that in a woman. You won't let yourself go to fat, will you, Jasmine? Will you touch them for me?"

That was too much. She hung up.

Three more calls and she made her threat. "Look buster, if you call again I'll get the phone company to put a tap on the line."

"Jasmine, Jasmine, you don't want to do that. Do you know it takes seventy seconds to trace a call?" He had found out that choice piece of information from the phone company. He'd called about a crank call he was getting and they were more than accommodating.

"Well, then I'll change my number."

"Fine with me. Remember, though, I can get in your apartment whenever I want. Change your number and I might not be content to just call."

She hung up. She needed time to digest what he'd told her. She let her phone ring twenty-five times, wondering what to do. Her head pounding, he imagined, she picked it up, slammed it down and left it off the hook the rest of the night.

She changed her number. He admired her spunk. He waited a week and while she was at lunch one day called her supervisor. He pretended to be from the phone company. She had complained of trouble on the line and he had to confirm her number. Simple . . . so very simple.

That night -- Tuesday. "One ringee-dingee." He

wore white bikini briefs and a white bra stuffed with foam to fill the massive cups.

"Two ringee-dingee."

"Hello." Relaxed, confident.

"I'm back."

She hung up immediately. Lying in bed, Roger kicked his legs in the air, laughed uproariously. Did she feel the fool? he thought.

Her next step would be a phone tap. Now he'd be particularly cautious. Short calls. Between calls, travelling to isolated phone booths he'd selected weeks before.

She surrendered. Thirty-two days. She'd put up a valiant fight. He was a bit sad . . . deflated when she succumbed. He toyed with her for a few days, having her fondle herself, talking dirty to him. Got you now, Jasmine, he thought. Got you Mama. *I'm* in control . . . *I'm* the boss . . . *I* make the decisions.

She was so docile now she nauseated him. She didn't turn him on anymore. He stopped calling. Sulked for a while, then began stalking again.

Jasmine, Stephanie, Laverne, Cindy, Mary Lou, Carmen, and now Sheila. Three years and the anticipation was still as powerful as the day he'd first spotted Jasmine.

He sensed his relationship with Sheila had just about run its course. She had been more compliant than the others. She hadn't changed her number and refused to keep the phone off the hook. He almost wanted to scold her. "What's wrong with you, Sheila," he wanted to say. "You're not even trying. Fight back. Show some backbone."

He had badgered her for a week and one night called twenty-five times -- hanging up himself a few times when she answered. Vary the pattern. Keep her off guard. Control. Total domination. At six in the morning, she unexpectedly gave in.

"What do you want?"

He had to stifle a gasp of surprise. He recovered quickly, though. "Talk dirty to me."

She did, and everything else he commanded.

He was pissed. She had cheated him. He had spent months stalking her, digging into her background, spying on her. What had she done? -- given in after *one* week, for Chrissake. She'll pay, dammit, he thought. Oh yes, she'll pay.

He had her at his beck and call for a week and then he stopped calling. Make her think he abandoned her . . . just like Mama. He had done this before with some of his women. With each he could imagine the tension building the first day -- the anticipation. Looking at the phone . . . waiting for it to ring . . . even willing it to ring to get it over with. Even more paranoid the second night. Could he be in the apartment? they'd think. He could see them searching through each room. Had she angered him? Was he on his way to carry out his threats of

slashing her face? By the third night she'd begin to relax a bit. Could it be over? Maybe the fucker had been hit by a car.

Early the next morning . . . he'd call.

"One ringee-dingee." He'd be at home, in his bra and panties. This was the best. He was pumped.

"Hello." Instantly awake. A trained dog . . . a stupid mutt.

"I'm back." He could feel them crumble within.

He gave Sheila her three days. Hell, gave her a fourth. He was so angry at her he wanted to punish her. No, not really. He never wanted to hurt any of them. His threats were just that -- empty threats. But, he wished Sheila was more like the others. He wished she'd put up some resistance, so he gave her an extra day to make his return all the more terrifying.

He called.

"One ringe . . ."

She answered immediately. Had she been sitting by the phone the whole time? he wondered. Momentarily disoriented, he was at a loss for words.

"Is that you? You've been in my apartment. I know you have. Last night I could smell you. Don't deny it. I did what you wanted. I took off my bra. I know you were watching. I squeezed them . . . hard, just like you wanted. You left, but I knew you'd be calling."

He couldn't get a word in edgewise. She was a dam that burst, pouring out her anguish. She didn't wait for a reply. She talked dirty to him.

"Want me to suck my thumb?"

"Want me to fondle my tits? Harder? Harder still?" He could hear the pain in her voice as she squeezed.

"What else do you want? I'll do anything -- just don't come in my apartment again. Don't rape me. Don't cut me. I'll be a good girl. Just tell me what you want."

"Nothing, Sheila. Go to sleep now."

Roger hung up . . . deflated. Sheila had been a mistake. Too fragile . . . not at all like Mama. He'd known almost immediately, but he'd let his ego get in the way of his common sense. The loss of control bothered him . . . for about twenty minutes. Learn from your mistakes, but don't dwell on them. His credo.

The consummate predator, he'd seek out new prey. Stalk her . . . make her his. Someone strong . . . a fighter . . . someone worthy of him.

He went out for a walk, his mind distracted with details of the hunt to come. He unexpectedly found himself across from Sheila's apartment. The police had cordoned off the street. A crowd had gathered. He edged his way within earshot of two officers, their eyes fixed on a figure draped in a blanket.

"Can you figure it? A looker like that takes the plunge?"

"Probably dumped by a boyfriend."

"Or found out he was married."

"What's the damn M.E. doing?
I'm freezing my ass out here."

"He's up in 3C checking the
place over. Shouldn't be long."

Roger felt the crowd closing in
on him . . . staring at him . . . pointing
at him. *He's the one*, he could hear
them thinking. Panic-stricken, he
elbowed his way out and ran, heed-
less of drawing attention. 3C . . .
Sheila; the draped body . . . Sheila;
took the plunge . . . Sheila; why? . . .
because of *him*.

At home he cowered in the
corner of his room. He looked at the
phone. Wanted to call . . . call Sheila.
"I never would have hurt you, Sheila.
As God is my witness, I'd never harm
a hair on your head."

Later grief gave way to anger.
God damn you, Sheila. God damn
you, Mama. *I'm* the boss. *I'm* in
control. You cheated me again,
Mama. Made me hurt her. Made me
drive her to death.

Never again, he vowed. He'd
never hurt anyone again -- *ever*.

He kept his promise -- one
week, a month, six months. Like an
alcoholic, though, the urge was always
there. At first, a whisper --
hardly audible -- later a scream. No,
a command . . . a command that
couldn't be denied.

He went to a payphone. Hands
trembling, he dialed.

"Talk dirty to me," he said.
Waited . . . smiled.

"That's good. Now suck your
thumb. Take off your bra . . ."

He went home, undressed and
put on a bra and panties -- the red
ones, Jasmines'.

Noticed his answering machine
blinking.

Played it back.

"Talk dirty to me."

He did.

-- CD



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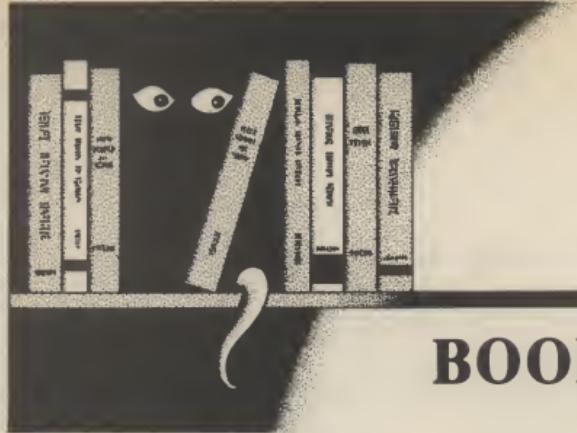
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EDWARD BRYANT

BOOK REVIEWS

At least for us outsiders, there seems to be a lesson in Stephen King's new collection, *Four Past Midnight* (Viking, \$21.95, 763 pp). Just as happened in the similarly structured four-novella set, *Different Seasons*, the master story-spinner of the American century demonstrates what he can do when he writes comparatively short and direct, punching right to the heart and brain, cutting to the bone, tapping tear ducts and adrenal glands as though they were sugar maples. I say "comparatively" because King's novellas in this book are about as long as other people's entire paperback originals back in the dear, dead days before literary gigantism became both a menace to North American forests and an inflated, greedy-guts pass to popular marketability.

In baseball terms, *Four Past Midnight* bats about .850, not too shabby in any league. The four novellas each have distinctly individual personalities. They each provide entertainment commensurate with the reader's investment of time in reading them, and all have something legitimate to say about the author-as-craftsman. A lot of the charm of the book is in what is says about writing and the writer himself, as well as treating the primary thing, the fiction.

Like the proverbial one-ton gorilla, Stephen King can do anything he wants, and he uses that power wisely and well in *Four Past Midnight*. At least half the book is the author rethinking and reworking old materials -- not rewriting as such, but still making some considered and thoughtful decisions about previous stories and themes he's tackled in the past. Most of the rest of us never get a second chance, so it's a pleasure to see a colleague handle that challenge and, for the most part, make it work.

The binding energy of this large book is provided by the author's introduction and story notes. There's a little autobiographical material here, some astute observation, and some useful literary footnoting. The tone is fascinating, and to me not nearly so extroverted as most of King's previous, similar notetaking. I may be "way off as an observer, but the auctorial feeling seems a little bemused, rather sober, a whole lot wry. It's concise, useful, and highly readable, connoting a writer who's been through a lot over the past fifteen or twenty years. Give him enough time to fill out his first quarter century as a creative artist and King will probably write one killer of a literary autobiography.

Ah, but how's the fiction? It's

a four-course banquet.

Four Past Midnight leads from strength with "The Langoliers," a rather more satisfying and successful version of the survival themes in "The Mist." But while "The Mist," in both its incarnations, never really felt complete in terms of plot sequence and closure, "The Langoliers" does most everything right, setting up intriguing characters, a decent plot, challenging problems for the folks in the story, and a genuinely horrendous set of antagonists to deal with.

I read the story on a flight from Denver to Philadelphia, which turned out to be a highly appropriate venue. A dozen airline passengers on a redeye from L.A. to Boston wake up from bad dreams to find everyone else on the flight missing, and the widebody L1011 droning along on autopilot. Fortunately one of the survivors is a deadheading commercial pilot returning home to deal with the accidental death of his ex-wife. The other passengers include a little blind girl, a British secret agent, and a businessman who demonstrates by his nastily swinish ways the need for eugenics when it comes to breeding yuppies. Once the pilot takes control of the plane and everyone has a chance to look around, it becomes clear that something is dreadfully wrong at ground-level America 36,000 feet

down. There are no lights, no signs of city. There's no signal on the air waves when the survivors use the plane's radio. If this sounds vaguely like an old *Twilight Zone* episode, don't worry. The truth turns out to be much more like Jerry (*Costigan's Needle*) Sohl than Rod Serling. At a loss for a better plan, the survivors fly east, avoid Boston because of heavy cloud cover, and land in Bangor, Maine. The airports's still there, all right, but it's deserted. And there's something seriously wrong with little things like sound, and the air itself,

it comes to keeping the plot complicated, yet plays fair with common sense and logic. Every time you think the writer has forgotten something, *bingo*, the cast catches on to what's happening and does something ingenious but reasonable. Menace comes both internally and externally and it's suitably scary. No character, no matter how sympathetic, is safe. And when the final menaces, philidickian Odor Eaters sorts of agents of entropy, come on the scene, all ready to devour whatever cast-off obsolete reality the humans now

other angle of approach to *The Dark Half*, but without a lot of feinting, flinching, or extraneous running around. This is a 146-page portrait of a writer in deep trouble. Morton Rainey is a best-selling novelist living by himself up in the Northeast after separating from his wife. One afternoon he's confronted by a redneck cracker from Mississippi who claims Rainey stole one of the man's stories. Plagiarism, whether deliberate or unconscious, blatant or subtle ("Well . . . gee, friends, I thought it was just good research . . ."), is always a matter of some interest to writers. If we haven't committed that deadly sin ourselves, we've perhaps been the victim, or, more likely, we've watched the whole sordid mess enfold friends or acquaintances.

When you start to suspect that everything you know is wrong, that's when fear begins. *"Secret Window, Secret Garden"* is full of fear. It's a writerly story that I hope will mean something to the readers whose only conscious connection with writing was filling out the reservation coupon for this book at their local mall chain bookstore.

And if there's a problem with the story, it's probably the sort of thing writers can debate at bleary literary parties. The author makes a conscious decision at the end when he determines whether *"Secret Window, Secret Garden"* is a supernatural fantasy, a weird version of ugly realism, or an ambiguous fictive mugwump. I think maybe the total effect is diminished by the choice that's nailed down. That quibble aside, the rest of the story hums. Well . . . like teeth grinding.

"The Library Policeman" is one of those great childhood images that Stephen King has turned into nearly 200 pages of midwestern nightmare. Did your parents or teachers ever tell you that carelessly overdue books would be reclaimed by the Library Cop? He's one of the great archetypes, along with the gum collector, that original recycler who scrapes up



and, well . . . everything. The sightless but psychic little girl detects the ominous approach of something terrible from the east.

"The Langoliers" is not supernatural horror. If one is looking for a neat label, the novella is indeed horror, but of a rigorously science fictional nature. It poses a series of problems that the characters have to solve. King covers his rear well when

inhabit, well, it's a real party.

At 239 pages, this novella could easily have been expanded into a behemoth. But it wasn't, and we should be grateful. No cereal extenders here. In terms of evoked characters, a complete plot, and some nice imaginative imagery, "The Langoliers" works just fine.

The second novella, "Secret Window, Secret Garden," takes an-

the stale Beeman's and Wrigley's from the undersides of cafe booths and movie house seats.

Anyhow, smalltown Iowa realtor Sam Peebles finds himself in serious trouble with the Library Policeman after he checks a couple reference books out of the local library. Sam has never before visited his town library, nor has he visited any library in quite a long time. He doesn't consciously realize it, but he has his reasons.

In this one, King does a terrific job of setting up a bucolic, Jimmy Stewart sort of landscape, and then places Wes Craven in charge to direct it to destruction. Like the first story in *Four Past Midnight*, "The Library Policeman" is satisfyingly complete in itself. Everything's here. It doesn't need to be any longer than it is. The sympathetic characters are nicely drawn. Themes of abuse, whether substance or child, run through the story, and they're handled effectively and with candor.

There is an unhuman monster, however, and when the thing appears in its true form, all snotty, mucoid, and basically disgusting, it's simply not as menacing as when it was passing for human in the shadows. Again, it's an artist's choice: show the critter with the potential for diminishing its effect because of the zipper in the back of the suit? Or try to let it continue playing off the fertile imagination of the reader's worst fantasies.

At any rate, "The Library Policeman" is a good, satisfying tale, and it's also, just like "The Langoliers," got the potential for translating to a very effective movie.

Four Past Midnight winds up with "The Sun Dog," marginally the shortest piece in the book, and probably the least effective. Not that it's bad, mind you, just less satisfying in its incompleteness.

The author, in his story note, cops to "The Sun Dog" being a sort of transitional piece between *The Dark Half* and *Needful Things*, the novel King says will be his last statement on

Castle Rock, Maine. The story's about all the sinister things that happen when Kevin Delevan receives a Polaroid Sun 660 instant camera for his 15th birthday.

Something strange goes wrong immediately. Regardless of what the viewfinder shows, every picture taken with the camera depicts a genuinely mean-looking dog on a sidewalk. More, there's a sequence of movement to the dog from print to print. And as the dog starts to react to the photographer and move closer to the camera, it appears to be readying a spring and, worse, changing into some sort of demonic creature that looks like it just might be powerful enough, somehow, to break through from its world to ours. Naturally this realization puts a damper on Kevin's amateur photography, but only encourages Pop Merrill, the local junk store dealer who, upon learning of the camera's magic quality, figures he can unload the Polaroid for big bucks to some New Age mystical-types.

The idea of an instant camera from hell (cursed? haunted?) is a perfectly fine EC Comics sort of image. The problem is all the questions that are raised and never addressed. Where does the camera come from? Why does Kevin get it? Just what is the relationship between the other world of the instant photos and this one? It may well be that *Needful Things* will answer these and other queries. But for now, "The Sun Dog" is all the reader has to work with. And there's no sense of closure, physical or psychological, to leave the reader with a reasonable sense of completion, satisfaction. The characters are flesh and blood, the horror conceit is good, but the story, as story, is frustrating.

And that's why I can't say the collection bats a thousand. But it's pretty damned close. Just as did *Different Seasons*, *Four Past Midnight* shows off the author to advantage. Stephen King has the talent to do well at whatever length of fiction he chooses to address, but it seems that the novella form is particularly hos-

pitable. It's long enough to allow most of the beennies of the long form, yet short enough to require tight writing.

Good job.

**

1989, that notorious Year of Dan Simmons, has easily stretched on into 1990. Something like the old International Geophysical Year, we're talking perhaps 24 months. Or longer. 1990 has already seen the climatic *The Fall of Hyperion* and the gut-wrenching *Entropy's Bed At Midnight*. Now here's *Prayers To Broken Stones* (Dark Harvest, \$20.95, 304 pp), the first collection of Dan Simmons's short fiction.

This is also essentially the short fiction of Dan Simmons. Most of his considerable energies have been funneled into novels. There are included 11 reprints, one script adapted by Simmons from his own story, and one brand-new novelette.

The book begins with "The River Styx Runs Upstream," the fantasy that won Simmons his *Twilight Zone Magazine* Award for best unpublished writer and launched his professional career back in that dim year, 1982. It continues with "Eyes I Dare Not Not Meet in Dreams," a story about telepathy and the nature of compassion. "Vanni Fucci Is Alive and Well and Living In Hell" is one of several Simmons pieces that treats the worst excesses of religious fundamentalists gone berserk and gives them a justified drubbing. Ditto with "Vexed to Nightmare by a Rocking Cradle," a less-than-cheery Christmas tale.

"Remembering Siri" shows some of the roots of the whole, elaborate, richly detailed universe more fully painted in the novel divided into *Hyperion* and *The Fall of Hyperion*. "Metastatis" is a tough little tale of cancer vampirism and familial love. "The Offering" is the script Simmons wrote, translating "Metastatis" into a pretty fair episode of the syndicated *Monsters* series. "E-Ticket to Nam-

land" appeared originally in *Omni* and is Simmons's reply to his perceived American cultural responses to the Vietnam War.

"Iverson's Pits" is a literate EC-Comics approach to a historically valid Civil War episode. The painless historical research content is a wonder to behold. "Shave and A Haircut, Two Bites" has a silly title, but is a nicely told fantasy of growing up that puts readers through all sorts of wonderful turns in altering what at first seems to be a standard vampire tale into something quite different. This story also became a *Monsters* episode.

"Two Minutes Forty-Five Seconds" is a techno-horror response to the Challenger disaster. Simmons researched the event intensely, then wrote a perfect cameo blazing white-hot with anger. "Carrión Comfort" is the novella-seed of the huge novel about rape, human manipulation and mind-vampirism.

"The Death of the Centaur" is the brand-new piece in the book. It draws from Simmons's own career as a teacher and again taps into his intense anger about what happens to the kids when the educational system goes wonky. As a sidelight, it also gives the reader another fascinating and tantalizing glimpse into the ancestral roots of the *Hyperion Cantos*.

Not all the stories are equally effective. But the spread is instructive, the range impressive. There is no such thing as a typecast Simmons story in this book. What is demonstrated is a marvelous range of intellectual concerns, passionate commitments, keenly honed artistic blades -- and stretching exercises. Don't forget that no matter how accomplished most of these pieces already are, they represent Dan Simmons's beginnings as a writer. Take the collection as a whole. This book is an architectural plan for the construction of a major literary career. The keystones, the corner pieces, the solid and the decorative -- it's all here.

**

Finally, let's consider the sophomore curse, the concern among many relatively new writers that no matter how terrific the debut novel is, the second book can be a more difficult challenge. The better and more enthusiastically received the first book, the more trouble with the second. Feeling that one must meet editors' and readers' expectation is a bear. And it is a curse.



Last year Nancy A. Collins won immediate acclaim and wonderful sales when she published her vampire novel, *Sunglasses After Dark*. Now there's *Tempier* (NAL Onyx, \$4.50, 304 pp.). It may well not garner the same warm and fuzzies. It's not all the book's fault, though this novel does possess some very real problems. Following up a debut that kindled readers' imaginations and played to their enthusiasms sets up a tough situation. *Sunglasses* possessed color up the wazoo, moved at a 4/4 beat, tossed some new and nice images into the mythology of blood-sucking, and created some terrific characters. It also had novelty. As with anyone else publishing a dynamic first novel, Collins will never have that advantage again.

So *Tempier* is obliged with having to be a 150 percenter just to stay even with its predecessor. The

story's about a young woman in New Orleans who becomes involved with a one-time hot rocker who's struggling back along the pop music comeback trail. But what poor Charlie (Charlotte) Calder doesn't know is that her new lover ("boyfriend" is probably a little too kind a euphemism) Adam Rossiter has stumbled on a dandy way to accelerate his return to the top -- and it's got something to do with one's soul, and vampires, and *voudou*.

Collins's strong suits in this novel are the background setting and the textures. She knows Louisiana well, especially New Orleans, and she seems to have checked out *voudou* pretty well too. Her characters also have fairly emphatic and demonstrative sexual lives, traits not always treated effectively in horror.

There is an ingenious and imaginative cameo of just how a vampire masturbates. And then there's the last line of the book, which is a killer.

But there are problems. It's hard to describe, but there doesn't seem to be the same tight core that centered *Sunglasses*. One of the author's strengths has been her fascinating (and often fascinatingly bizarre) characters. That doesn't play through in *Tempier*. The *los*, the *voudou* gods work pretty well during their brief appearances. But many of the human characters, the *voudou* priestess Ti-Alice and the musician Arsine, to name just two, get short shrift. And the really bad guy, a sort of hybrid Gilles de Rais and Dracula, just doesn't pan out. Promising beginnings, but then no full potential is realized. I think that readers will note and feel some pangs of disappointment.

There seems to be some innate artistic conservatism here, a pulling of punches, that simply wasn't there in *Sunglasses*. The best way I can put it is to mention part of Adam Rossiter's *roman à clef* background. Adam's a tortured antihero who, when he was just starting out in rock 'n' roll, slept with a doomed rock star

who spoke with a Texas drawl and reeked of Southern Comfort, and then talked metaphysics with a doomed rockstar named Jim who was bound for a Paris cemetery.

Maybe it should have been the other way around.

**

SHORT TAKES

Lawrence Watt-Evans has published seven fantasy books and a half dozen SF novels. *The Nightmare People* (NAL Onyx, \$3.95, 254 pp.) is his first tale of contemporary horror. In terms of treatment and tone, it reminds me somewhat of John Carpenter's low-budget film of paranoiac excess, *They Live*. The novel's protagonist is Edward J. Smith, a Maryland computer jock who discovers one morning that he's the only apparent inhabitant of the hundreds of folks in his apartment block. But before the authorities can get fully mobilized to investigate the mass disappearance, Smith's neighbors return. Everything's cool, they've got a reasonable cover story. But it doesn't take long before Smith realizes there's something more than just a little wrong with his erstwhile neighbors. The returnees are somehow different. Then our hero tumbles to the scary fact that the folks next door are actually flesh-eating aliens with needle-teeth, and they're disguising themselves in the skins of their human victims. Fortunately for Smith, the aliens -- perhaps the next evolutionary step in evil -- just aren't very swift. The primary charm in the book lies in the author's depicting the horrendous villains as smart-mouth doops who just aren't quite swift enough -- mentally or physically -- to annihilate the humans who find out about the alien conspiracy. Watt-Evans never really gets most of his too-prickly-to-easily-cooperate-in-saving-the-world human characters to take on the life they constantly fight for, but the inept minions of evil do a lot to compensate.

Al Sarrantonio shares some of

the same characterization problems in *October* (Bantam, \$3.95, 256 pp.), but unfortunately doesn't have as amusing (and occasionally chilling) and antagonist. The book starts out well, with a quirky actor, burned out on playing Abe Lincoln in a film, taking his dog and wandering off across America in an attempt to recover some sort of regeneration. He makes it to a chunk of bucolic East Coast apple country where, years before, something horrible happened at a kids' Halloween party. Then we meet a hot young prof who's facing departmental peer assassination, in part because he wants to bring proper public attention to a local woman whose brilliant writing about things occult is undervalued. The writer is sliding downhill with Alzheimer's. So far, so good. The real problem surfaces as it becomes apparent that the requisite balancing act to give all the novel's potentially fascinating characters and relationships life is seriously out of whack. This may be one of the few popular novels where the writer writ too spare. The crisp autumn tone makes up in mood for the frustrating gaps in the characters gaping and gasping for life. Almost.

If Nancy Collins's *Sunglasses After Dark* ever becomes a feature film, the soundtrack could do much, much worse than use Concrete Blonde's title song from *Bloodletting* (I.R.S., \$9.95, 10 tracks) as the main theme. The tune is a driving, eerie, doomed-romance ("Love is a vampire/Drunk on your blood" says a line from "The Beast," another song on the album) ballad about vampires, lovers, and New Orleans. The major strengths of Concrete Blonde are the edgy lyrics and the powerful, distinctive delivery of vocalist Johnette Napolitano. This is driving, literate rock that functions perfectly well as music on its own terms; however, it also works just fine if you want some background accompaniment as you orally drain the carotid of your beloved.

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HOOSIER HORRORS: A Conversation with J. N. Williamson

Conducted by D.W. Taylor



PHOTO CREDIT: Doubtless Photography

J.N. Williamson is this issue's featured author. An original short story, "Wotan's Oak," and a special tribute article follow this interview!

The *Penguin Encyclopedia of Horror* and the *Supernatural* calls him "the seemingly indefatigable J.N. Williamson," and he is. But looking at this almost white-haired, bespectacled 57-year-old grandfather whose gentle baritone voice is rich with laughter, you'd guess him to be a Rotarian, maybe. But horror writer? Hardly.

Yet his looks are as deceiving as his prose, which can sneak upon you like a cat on padded claws, rubbing the nape of your neck, ticklish as the blade of a guillotine; or stalk you like a great beast, backing you relentlessly into a narrow corner of your mind, then lunging at your throat, teeth bared, in an all-out terror alert. Either way, there is no escape.

Although Williamson got off to a late start as a full-time penman of peril, not writing his first novel until age 43, he certainly hasn't wasted any time since. After *The Ritual* in 1975, his 36 paperback originals of horror and the occult have earned him both a wide readership and a permanent station in the ranks of American popular fiction. He served as the inaugural Secretary of the Horror Writer's of America, a post he filled with his legendary energy

and devotion to the genre, and to his fellow writers.

The tireless Jerry Williamson has also found time to edit hardcover anthologies like *Masques*, which garnered a Balrog Award and was runner-up for 1984's World Fantasy Award, and was followed in May 1987 by *Masques II*, another World Fantasy runner-up, and *Masques III* in 1989 from St. Martin's Press. Williamson also edited the popular *How To Write Tales of Horror, Fantasy, and Science Fiction*, featuring the non-fiction ruminations of some of fantasy's best fictioneers: Colin Wilson, Ray Bradbury, Ramsey Campbell, Richard Matheson, Robert R. McCammon, and Dean R. Koontz, to name but a few.

Home base for Williamson's steady stream of screams is the unlikely Indianapolis, Indiana, where he resides with his wife Mary Theresa and a mutt named Nikki.

CEMETERY DANCE: About your background: Were you Hoosier born and bred? And why have you set virtually all your novels -- with a few exceptions such as *Playmates* and *The Black School* -- in Indianapolis? Is that city a particularly good place for horror?

J.N. WILLIAMSON: In a way, Indianapolis is the ideal place to write horror. Much of horror literature is about ordinary people in ordinary places confronted by strange and bizarre circumstances. But to answer the first question, yes, I was born here and have lived in Indy all my life, except for a stint in the Army. When I wrote my first novel, I started to set it in New York City, then realized the only reason I was doing that was because most of the books I was reading at the time were set there. That irritated me! I'm an independent guy and the idea that there was something wrong with other big cities in the United States or that interesting things couldn't happen anywhere except in New York or Los Angeles appeared absurd to me. Once I dis-

covered that, I began a long series of novels that took place generally in Indianapolis; also many other towns and cities in the Hoosier state, including two "mythical" towns: Doyle, the site of *The Tulpa*, and Thessaly, vampire Lamia Zacharius' home base for her dark deeds in the *Death* series. Come to think of it, the only island "off South Bend" exists in my novel *Premonition*.

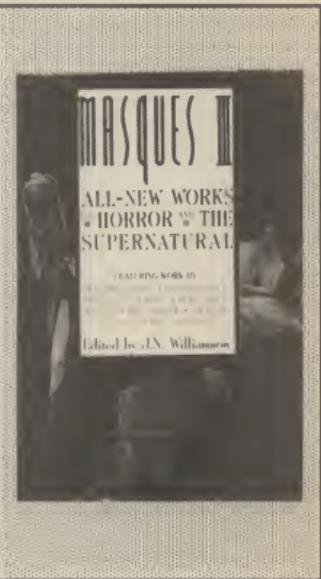
CD: Why did you wait until age 43 to write that first novel? Was there always a novelist inside of you struggling to be free? What made you finally say, "I'm a writer not an ad man, professional recording artist, software salesman, or Pinkerton detective," all of which you have been?

JNW: I'd published a number of short stories over the years but didn't write a novel before then. I used to think the main reason was the fact that I had married a woman with four children and we had two more. Of the six at least two were either diagnosed as emotionally maladjusted or should have been diagnosed as such. Only one of those was my step-child. Each had horrendous lives at one point or another. When I've been asked this question in the past I've blamed it on them. Yet the older I get and the more discipline I have as a writer, the more I'm inclined to believe that blaming them is a cop-out. If I had really, *really*, wanted to write more, I surely could have found time for it. I want to be honest about this point. There are a lot of potential writers who read this kind of interview, and I'm telling them to try to be honest with themselves. They probably can find more time to write than they think they have at first glance. In other words, I had good reasons not to write -- but people who really want to achieve, somehow find ways to get it done.

CD: It takes courage to admit something like that about yourself.

JNW: Thanks. You know, writing on

a constant basis is itself, I've found, one of the best ways to learn things not only about yourself but everyone else. I think sometimes that the greatest education I've had is simply writing. That's been enhanced by the opportunity, which I didn't really seek, to edit and teach. I've had the chance to see the work of hundreds of pros and amateurs, and the result is a kind of informal encyclopedic view of the world of writing. I think that probably most people who write as much as I do wind up being far less self-deceptive than the average person is.



CD: At the outset of your career you wrote a lot of novels very quickly, amazingly quickly. And often they were strong stuff, all-out revulsive horror for houses like Leisure and Zebra. Did you consciously do things differently when you were recently writing for publishers like Dell and St. Martin's?

JNW: Yes, I do want to get away from the idea, which most people have, that I'm "prolific." It's basically the first word that comes to mind about J.N. Williamson, and there's a

connotation of an unpleasant sort there. I don't think it's a fair one. I can cite, for example, one of my favorite writers, Dean R. Koontz. Dean has been at it, although he is younger than I, much longer and has written and published so many novels that he's told me he has no idea how many there actually are. He literally has no idea! And he's a fine writer. I'll say this for being prolific: Since what almost any professional advises a new writer to do is write, write, write, there is a terrible inconsistency in saying or implying that a professional can write too much. However, while I'm not cutting down the amount of time I spend in what can be lumped under the term "writing," I've tried to diversify more in the last five or six years. Partly because I suspect that the average reviewer or the average reader suspects that someone who has edited a book really hasn't spent all that damn much time on it and hasn't really worked all that hard. After all, the stories or articles were written by other people. This, of course, is nonsense. I've found that editing anthologies is a terribly difficult thing to do if you care about achieving a balance or trying to get the people that you want into it at their best. However, my heart will always remain with my own writing, and perhaps one day I'll die and my wife, as Stephen King's imagined she'd do, will pull out of the drawer five or six novels and 30 or 40 short stories that no one has ever seen. King has also been considered a "prolific" writer and has had to deal with that same curse.

In regard to Leisure and Zebra, let me say a couple of important things, please: First, with one exception, I have not disowned any of my novels. I think *Playmates*, *Tulpa*, *Ghost*, *Noonspell*, and *The Longest Night* -- from Leisure Books -- are as original as any horror novels written since the seventies; that *Death-School*, *Death-Doctor*, *Ghost Mansion*, and its sequel, *Horror Mansion*, along with *The Evil One* -- all Zebra novels -- are worth keeping, worth

reading. That's why I didn't hesitate to return to Zebra, once I knew that I could work with an editor as talented as Michael Seidman and earn an advance nearly twice that which I had ever been paid before. Zebra and Leisure get their books out there; they are *read*. The other drawbacks may continue, but some of them exist primarily in writers' and agents' imaginations.



CD: About your work as an editor, the first *Masques* enjoyed great success and was your breakthrough debut in that role. Did you dare mess with a good thing in *Masques II*? What was different in the second installment?

JNW: We were fortunate in that the first anthology was so well reviewed that I could reasonably expect stories by the same authors whom I asked which were at least as good as their others. I could also reject, for *Masques II*, anything that smacked of being a so-called "trunk story." Without a reputation as an anthologist at the time I was editing *Masques*, I was lucky to get any of the fine writers I corralled. I was also deter-

mined, from the time that John Maclay asked me to assemble a second collection, to use a mixture of writers from the first anthology with those I hadn't asked before. Steve King, Ramsey Campbell, and the fiction of Richard Matheson, instead of his interview are prime examples of the change. For the record, I did have a terrible time deciding whom to ask back. Robert R. McCammon was the only author in the first *Masques* whom I sought and didn't get. Rick was deep into the writing of *Swan Song* then.

CD: *Masques III* has been receiving good reviews, and two stories plus a poem from it were recently selected for Ellen Datlow's *Year's Best Fantasy & Horror*. Were you surprised by any of the stories you received? What new directions did some of the writers take?

JNW: I think an editor who has assembled an anthology or two has some sort of plan for the next one, in terms of writers to be used. Not necessarily their names, but what kind of stories would be interesting this time. In the case of each original anthology I've edited, however, writers I haven't known or preferred for that given book have come along to surprise me. In this instance, I don't just mean new, unknown writers, let me add. *Masques III* began as an anthology that was going to be the most severely serious, ambitious, poignant and meaningful one ever put together. Then other kinds of tales began to arrive. Ultimately, I had to divide *Masques III* into sections in order to achieve the balance I sought. So there are "Stories for All Seasons," "The 'New' Horror," "Concerns of the Mind and Spirit" and "Creature of Terror Tales." If there was a new direction *per se*, I think it involved this.

The selections I made that sometimes seemed to trouble the publisher tended more to be found in the middle two categories or subsets of horror than the first or the fourth.

Two tales of "new" horror were viewed either as too bitterly existential or too vague, while two of the solemn "Mind and Spirit" stories appeared to get too close to reality and possibly too controversial for comfort. I'm delighted by the variety of horror/supernatural fiction in *Masques III*. It's a cross section of life today, today's fears, and I'll be disappointed if some readers aren't stimulated to outrage, tears, wild applause, and other strong emotions. Some have implied that if I have a weakness as an anthologist it's that I haven't taken chances. The writers in *Masques III* and I have taken a lot of chances.

CD: Another Williamson-edited book, *How To Write Tales of Horror, Fantasy, and Science Fiction*, brings together some of the best authors from rather different genres. It saw a second printing in 1989 and, eventually, the publisher plans a trade paperback edition. Obviously, there was and continues to be a substantial demand for this kind of how-to book. Had such a collection ever been attempted before?

JNW: To tell the truth, I can't remember any non-fiction book -- and few fiction books -- in which the three genres were brought together. Beyond that, I've never been able to find a contemporary "how-to-write horror" book of any kind, but Bill Nolan may be writing one now. In terms of actually teaching a reader how to get from one point to another in every area of fantasy, I think my *How-To* is an entirely new thing.

CD: How did you manage to corral the best writers from all three categories?

JNW: That was a good trick! I knew the horror writers, of course. And I knew a couple of the science fiction writers, but not really well enough to make any kind of a personal appeal. So, as with the *Masques* books, there was a great need to get a highly-re-

spected writer or two who would agree to do it so that I could refer to them when I talked to other writers. As it was with the first *Masques*, Ray Bradbury's agreeing to be in *Masques II* and again in *Masques III* turned the tide for me. Then the fact that Marion Zimmer Bradley also agreed to write a chapter didn't hurt the *How-To*.

CD: Is the book just for writers? What would a reader get out of it?

JNW: Well, personally I'd pay \$16 for new, opinionated, very intimate, surprisingly long works by Bradbury, Robert Bloch, and Colin Wilson alone! Anything else would be a plus to me. I often felt I was getting material that was some of the finest writing by these professionals, and I have a theory of why that is true: Most of the people in the book ordinarily write fiction, rather than non-fiction. It was a case of not being able to dash something off. They really had to work at it; God knows, I did with the two chapters I wrote. Non-fiction is, after all, a function of mind-left, whereas creative writing is a function of mind-right. I spent much too long in mind-left to feel very comfortable in the editing of the book and the writing of those chapters.

CD: What about mind-center?

JNW: [Laughs] That's probably where I am right now, with you.

CD: Besides the novels and the editing chores, you've also published a great deal of short fiction in a variety of genres, including the *World Fantasy Award* runner-up novella, "Night Seasons" -- due out in January 1991 as a full-length novel from Pinnacle -- and my personal favorite, "Book of Websters," which has been compared favorably to Flannery O'Connor's "A Good Man is Hard to Find." How has your short fiction changed over the years?

JNW: A lot of it was changed simply

by my agreeing to become a fiction instructor for Writer's Digest School. That followed on the heels of editing *Masques* and was prior to my editing three more anthologies. During that period of time I didn't have the opportunity to write as much fiction as I normally would. What developed as a consequence of all this editing was an awareness of how to write short stories that I don't think I had access to with any regularity until about two years ago. I'm very displeased basically with most of the short fiction that I wrote until the last three or four years. There are recent exceptions, but most of my best short fiction, I feel, has been written in the last two years and at least half of that hasn't been published yet.



CD: Rick McCammon once said that he doesn't consciously try to write horror. His stories just happen to come out that way. Which raises an interesting question: Does an author choose his genre, or does it choose him? Which is true for you?

JNW: I think that we tend to write in different ways at different stages of our lives. I began by being so enamored of the Holmes stories that I fancied myself becoming a mystery

writer. Then I encountered all those brilliant short story writers who used to be billed as "science fiction" or "fantasy" writers, from Bradbury and Matheson and Fred Brown and Chuck Beaumont and Ray Russell down, and so I set out to write great sf. I'd submit a story to sf magazines and they'd send it back with notes telling me it was too bloody, or too shocking. Obviously, I was reacting as a young writer to elements and ideas of their fiction that their own editors were playing down! In the meantime, I placed many tales with *Ellery Queen's* but wrote them with a growing awareness that they were marginally acceptable to Fred and his fine magazine, and that I was sharply curtailing myself in what I wanted to say and do. It's in this area that a lot of current writers must be grateful to Ira Levin, Bill Blatty, and Steve King — not so much for making horror fiction respectable as for making it possible to call one's fiction what it was and not have to write and to market it covertly as "mainstream," "sf," etc.

When a writer begins to outgrow the overwhelming admiration he has for certain pros and their work and to see himself or herself clearly as an individual writer, a person, all that has been experience is sifted from one hemisphere of our brain to the other, and the genre in which we may succeed finds us. We may try any damn thing up to then! As for my writing horror, its clear to me now that I was always writing fantasy, at least. Even with the things bought by *EQMM*, including a "Sheerbach Tones and Dr. Bopson" parody. Or my first serious professional tale, "Time to Murder," in which a lover must hide on a ledge after the husband comes home unexpectedly. The ending is mordant for a mystery magazine. By the way, "Time to Murder" will be reprinted for the first time in an *Author's Choice* collection Dean Smith and *Pulphouse* are publishing. My collection is called *The Naked Flesh of Feeling*.

CD: So what you write simply turns out to be "horrific" -- for want of a better word. Why?

JNW: When I'm a total household name, you and other deep thinkers may want to explore that question. Generally, boyhood events -- and beliefs that were sort-of passed along to me by my mother -- are probably responsible. Though I was a spoiled boy, an only child for 14 years, my very talented mother (a professionally versatile pianist and song writer) saw ghosts around her many times as I was growing up. My father's mother was an astrologer and Rosicrucianist. There were a lot of hysterics, brawls, a drunken grandfather and a drunken uncle -- the latter virtually lived with us a lot of the time -- and Mother successfully conveyed to me her belief in reincarnations. Simultaneously, though she rarely attended church, her religious attitudes were fundamentalist in character -- none of which kept her from drinking, playing cards, cursing, and so forth. She'd play piano at three o'clock in the morning and improvise wonderful macabre melodies, sometimes take a break and beseech God -- at the top of her lungs -- to be kind. I had scarlet fever as a boy, and, ever afterward, Mother was convinced that I wouldn't grow up healthy or possibly at all. I've more or less expected to die since I was twelve or thirteen, and any time. I still live with that. Yet I also sang for many years with my parents' dance band, and had absolutely marvelous good times with my folks! Why wouldn't I write fantasy and, in particular, horror? Then, in my late teens and early twenties, I began to devour John Collier, Lord Dunsany, Ray Bradbury, then Robert Bloch, Charles Beaumont, Dick Matheson.

CD: Whose horror and fantasy fiction do you enjoy reading the most these days?

JNW: Nowadays, I find that I always enjoy novelists F. Paul Wilson, Dean R. Koontz, and Dan Simmons. In short stories I always love the work of Bradbury, Ray Russell, Richard Matheson, James Kisner, Mort Castle, Jeannette Hopper, most of Bob Bloch and Bill Nolan, Harlan Ellison, Roald Dahl, Graham Masterton, some Steve Rasnic Tem, and Adobe James. In non-fiction, my idol, my occasional correspondent, Colin Wilson ranks above all others for me. John A. Keel is the wittiest writer in paranormal non-fiction.

CD: Let's talk about your own books. First, an observation: In most of them, horror invades the nuclear family: *The Offspring*, *The Tulpas*, *Playmates*, *The Longest Night*, *Noonspell*, *Babel's Children*, *The Black School*, and your recent Dell novel *Shadows of Death*. Why? Is the family today an especially sensitive pressure point?

JNW: I think that the family as a basic unit of human existence is in *titanic* moral jeopardy today. So is all of what we wistfully call "modern civilization." Of any generation for the last 200-250 years, I believe we are the least modern in the sense of being truly concerned with the progress of our own kind. Literally everything humankind considers basic to decent survival, not just biologic survival, is in mortal peril. Because we all start life as part of a family of some kind, portraying it in danger of horrific or supernatural or *Pulphouse*-type risk serves as a warning to readers. Most readers are aware, I believe, that the antagonists or the adversary plot situations of horror fiction are often thinly veiled representations of the evil we're not quite honest enough to admit exists everywhere around us.

CD: Why are so many of your antagonists, as well as protagonists, academics and scientists with the title "Doctor"? One is reminded that three

archetypal works of horror also feature doctors: Dr. Van Helsing, Dr. Frankenstein, and Dr. Jekyll. What are you saying about the traditional limits of man's knowledge?

JNW: Part of what I have to say there is that I believe half of the best stuff has never been written down or has been brushed aside by the desire to combat formalized religious ritual with any old science that comes along. Just as we've found things such as penicillin by accident, the cures to most physiological and moral diseases are accessible both in long-lost alchemy and open-minded scientific inquiry into everything from astrology or reincarnation to ghosts and a million everyday objects that we take for granted. For my tastes, the *least* scientifically-minded people around these days tend to be scientists. I think the most spiritual people today are *not* in organized religion. The desires of most people originate outside their own minds, were created by someone else. Fantasy fiction does a better job of getting in touch with who we *really* are and what we *really* want to be than anything else can do -- or does.

CD: The theme of mortality, of trying to face death with dignity and acceptance, appears often in your work, especially the novels. Evil characters commit atrocities in their unnatural search for immortality. Why is this theme such a special concern of yours?

JNW: I don't like death. I resent it. I created a theory in one of my early novels -- *Premonition* -- that goes basically like this: If you could place a genetically healthy person on a warm, safe island with lots to eat, feed him a combination of good food and genuine facts and the most viable belief systems, allow him/her to love and be loved, plus have meaningful and fulfilling work, but never let him/her witness death or even know it's a possibility, he'd live to be at least 200 years old. What I'm saying is, society is inimical to your health -- physi-

cally, emotionally, mentally, and theologically. Particularly now. Death may not be required. We cooperate too much with the process of acknowledging our teen years, becoming thirty, forty, becoming sixty or sixty-five, admitting we're old. Calendar time is man-made; we forget that, accept out kinship with others, and so we die.



CD: Is that an answer to the critics who write off horror fiction because it can never be about "real things" and "real people?"

JNW: I believe horror fiction today is much closer to reality than most fantasy, by and large. Horror is less comfortably kept under that "fantasy" umbrella than science fiction is.

CD: But how do you respond to people who complain, "What's the point of writing this horror junk when there's so much real horror in the world today?"

JNW: My wife Mary got bored of reading fiction a couple of years ago. She turned to true crime. I think she

was drawn by the inclination to study first-rate, real investigation. Mary reads far faster than I, and by now she has a library of true crime books -- 98 percent of it published in this decade -- that are so unbearably lurid and violent that I can't get through hardly any of them. They're sickening! (I strongly recommend Ann Rule's *Small Sacrifices* and a more recent title, *The Mormon Murders*, a fascinating book though.) Horror writer Jim Kisner told me he can't read much of this stuff either.

This gives me the clue that writers of horror fiction are perfectly aware that they are writing *fiction* -- products of the imagination -- and that this fiction is usually a working-out of our internal and most basic attitudes toward "the world," "life." I believe we're trying unconsciously to make sense of terrible things most people can let brush off them and doing that far more often than we're eliminating real men and women we individually detest or fear. And as you know, I've been *consciously* preoccupied the past few years -- mostly in short fiction -- with trying to expose what I see as the social and psychological origins of real-life horror. I hope Graham Masterton's Tor anthology, *Scare Care*, shows how deeply authors of horror care about what's happening today. Too many readers are already perfectly able to read a news story or see one on television that would make Jack the Ripper's spree resemble a gift-laden visit to an orphanage, sip some beer, belch, and fall asleep. I'm haunted by these disgusting, genuine events. Public pressure on psychologists and sociologists has made it hard for them to make much progress in analyzing why this society is going into the toilet, fast. I think someone should try to figure it out, if only as a public record for the remnant of people who are able to read may study someday when "civilization" is a word with meaning, and life is being put back together.

CD: Pretty bleak. What's going to happen after the collective toilet is

flushed? Do you think horror fiction will still be around? I know of several publishers who believe the horror market today has gone "soft," that the boom is over and the signs of it are all around us. The end of an earlier horror boom, that of the 1920s and 30s, was signaled by Hollywood's resorting to spoofs of characters and ideas that formerly were treated seriously. *Abbott and Costello Meet Frankenstein*; that sort of thing. Today Steve Martin stars in *Little Shop of Horrors*. Even commercials for floor wax are mini-horror shows! So, is it over? Is horror about to take another nose dive to the bottom of the heap?

JNW: When horror pops up in Broadway shows and commercials, rather than suggesting it is passe, it provides a perfect example of the way writers and producers of all kinds are unconsciously scurrying about to climb on the horror bandwagon. In one sense horror is the literature of fear, but fear comes in all sizes. Most people are fearful of something each day, whether it's a small fear like asking for a raise, stage fright when we have to speak in person, feeling a need to conceal what we've done from someone, or the outcome when we're found out. The ongoing unconscious fears of aging and death are monsters that not only dwell within ourselves, they *are* ourselves. But there are a hell of a lot more! Driving to work on snow and ice, turning in a report to some authority figure, asking for a date, wondering how our kids will cope with the drug problem, seeing our parents grow old before our eyes. Monstrous problems, these are, terrifying ones that all people face. The magazines that say we're all terrified of getting nuked or AIDS are actually more escapist literature and less realistic than anything any pro in horror is writing. It's not that we *don't* fear such things. It's that we

have so many more immediate perils to confront and somehow deal with. Horror fiction tries, attempts over and over, to deal with these really personal, ongoing questions and problems.

CD: As usual in a conversation of any length or depth, we've arrived at the portals of religion. Are you saying that horror literature is another way of dealing with the same fears and doubts that religion is supposed to deal with -- especially about the supernatural?

JNW: Yes. I think that certain of us in horror fiction are among the only writers left attempting to deal with the concerns that once were those of religion. In my Dell novel *Hell Storm*, the one that continues my character Jacob Wier, I have a clergymannamed Reverend Keeno Spath who has come to the realization that something supernaturally hideous and destructive is not only motivating him to carve his own tombstone but infecting his parishioners with a bewildering, confusing dread -- a dread that causes their lives to break down and makes them vulnerable to a creature called the Huntsman who is lurking in the woods. He comes to the realization that while he has remembered to tag on his sermons a suitable Biblical quote, made himself smilingly accessible, and gone to visit sick people, he has no idea what to do during a time when the forces of good are warring with the forces of evil, and he's caught in between. He figures out that it's because he has been too busy helping people materially and keeping his own reputation spotless from charges of fanaticism that he has forgotten why he became a minister to start with. Forgotten that it had anything to do with God at all! Just as Quequec could imagine nothing else to do but prepare his coffin, all Reverend Spath can come

up with is his own headstone with an inscription carved in it. A warning.

Some people have called me a "Christian," even a "fundamentalist" on occasion. Perhaps I am, but they miss the allegorical point in my fiction entirely and most of the symbolism. In a way, I'm saying that it seems clear to me that the real world today is overrun by that which would have been called "evil" in almost any other age, and that by losing sight of our own selfhood, our personal standards of right and wrong, even our goals, and swapping them for a variety of basically silly indulgences, we are *creating* a world that is supernatural. We do not, cannot, understand what is happening. So we create belief systems out of dieting, jogging, the latest gadgetry and trends in music or pop art, carefully peopling this wholly imaginary world with figures of good -- athletes, for example -- and images of badness -- viruses, threats of nuclear war, incessantly changing authority images who can turn from savior to satan overnight. And we say we're modern, cool, with-it, making progress. People, from infants to our oldest citizens, are *dying out there*, and we're so preoccupied with our little monetary icons and avoiding having labels we don't like pinned on us that we never even notice where the horror is -- *in here*. This seems too obvious, to me, for me to consider writing about anything else, much! I repeat: I believe people who swear they are untainted by any "belief" and live life in accord with the god Science are devising their own world of the supernatural, and it's reacting against us all, it's haunting us. The enemy is us, yes. But it's also what the things we truly and unrealistically seek, from youth and kicks to the god Security, are doing, now that they are becoming real.

- CD

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WOTAN'S OAK

J.N. WILLIAMSON is *Cemetery Dance* #6's featured author!

"The death of one nourishes the other."

"Just see the strength and durability of this tree!" the taller man of the two raved, tapping it. "Sense the hardiness, the indomitable *life*, of this oak!"

His guest atop the hill overlooking the rundown graveyard felt querulous. He decided to show it. "I can't see anything much in this atrocious light," he complained. Here he was back home after many years and this chance reunion with a man he scarcely remembered had taken him to a cemetery at twilight! "Why in the world would you want me to come to this place, Herr Munin? Surely not to inspect the growth of the flora in my absence."

"Why not continue our little chat beneath such a handsome oak?" More suitably clad for this winter that seemed destined to linger through all of April, Munin wore a calf-length black coat with the collar up. His unlined face with the brightly curious eyes and his head with the close-cropped graying hair seemed to sit upon the coat collar. "Abraham spoke to angels under an oak, Herr Hugin. Augustine preached Christianity to the ancient Britons beneath the branches of a tree not unlike this hearty fellow!"

Hugin grunted. Trying to project a picture of polite attentiveness, he waited for his vision to adjust to the gloom -- and for the tall man to release him. "I'd forgotten the size of this graveyard. When I was here last, of course, it had not been divided." A tilt of his head indicated the remnant of the high wall behind Munin.

"And at last, the burial ground of our ancestors is once more one." Munin adjusted a dark glove he had removed to touch the oak and smoothed it sensually over his long fingers. "Not that the dead noticed such artificial boundaries." He raised an arm dramatically. "As I see it, the roots of this tree continued growing, unseen, worked their way to all the equally unseeable remains locked in the bosom of the earth. Of course" -- his head rolled in Hugin's direction -- "men of conviction know their revered ancestors shall not be confined to their caskets for eternity."

"You nearly make it sound as if the tree's roots have nurtured the dead in some manner." Hugin met the taller man's gaze challengingly.

"What a clever way to express it!" said Munin. He glanced down the hill at the nestling headstones. "One could believe such things, here."

"I didn't say that *I* believe it." Hugin frowned. "Believe what, exactly?"

Munin tucked his gloved hands beneath his armpits, pursed his lips. "In powers older than most religions. Believe that those forgotten powers may, from time to time, have oozed up from the ground. That they were incrementally and selectively emanated in order to mold and move the minds of talented men of -- of dark destiny."

"Too much! "Sir, when was it we met? It's true that you were familiar to me, as well. Where was it we met?"

"That will become clear, in good time." Crossing his arms over his chest, Munin leaned against the great oak but held his gaze upon the field of tombstones. "They're like patches of some eternal flowers capable of growing only above the skulls of the lifeless, aren't they? Allow me to trace my theory for you, Hugin. To hypothesize that the men who were influenced by the inexplicable emanations from this special soil were tarred by what society might term infamy. Now, suppose that the unique forces behind the influences existed very much for a *reason*." The ice-blue eyes brightened. "Suppose that the infamous were intentionally buried here, and the emanations succeeded in *renewing the zeal* that once animated and enlivened them."

"Renewed them?" Hugin eyed him suspiciously, warily. "But . . . the men are dead!"

"Suppose," Munin proceeded as though unhearing, "the forces behind these influences awaited a *specific time* before both renewing the spirits' zeal and *expanding* their prior boundaries?"

The small man looked away, shuffled his feet. "What time might that be?"

"You have forgotten much," said Munin, reproachfully. He shoved his toppling face and head closer. "My friend, a new century hoves upon the horizon."

Munin's breath was foul. "Well, what of it?" He had to leave this place, this fellow, soon! "What can be important about the new century?"

"An excellent point!" Munin cried, lifting his index finger. "It isn't so much that another century begins but that another, a span of ten decades -- of thirty-six thousand, five hundred days -- is *ending*!"

The man's ranting was a torment. Hugin hadn't returned home for this. Worse, as night showed itself in folds of darkness, Munin sounded almost threatening.

"Herr Hugin, the final days of a century arouse peculiar sensations even in those who do not wish to discuss it. Inescapable sensations of time rushing to some distantly foreordained fruition, only to perish. Don't deny it!" He drew near. "It's not just that a long stretch of time winds down, old friend. It is *true death*. Even as man dies."

"I'm sorry, but I really--"

"And just as a man's life," Munin continued, catching Hugin's wrist, "is said to reach a culmination, then be judged, the years of our lives and those of our fathers are *collected* at century end." He smiled, released Hugin. "Collected like coins of tarnished truth to be counted, polished. Judged -- and productive of *consequences*."

Massaging his wrist, Hugin sighed. "I dislike thinking of powers beyond our ken judging this century," he said amiably. "The war . . . torture . . . inhumanity. The awful dying. One has but to think of Hitler, and --"

"Fascinating." Munin flashed a satisfied smile. "That you cite the Fuehrer."

"*The masses (need) a thrill of terror.*"

"Well, why not cite him in this place?" Hugin said hastily. His own will to leave was gone, he realized. Now he had to hear more of what this fellow had to say. "But it's fascinating that *you* refer to Adolf Hitler as 'Fuehrer.'"

"The topic consists of time and oak trees, and memories." Munin suddenly pointed at his guest. "Hitler was born April 20th in the year 1889."

"What of it?"

"It was planned, my friend -- and predicted!" A mirthless smirk. "Hitler was born so precisely on the cusp or borderline of Aries and Taurus that no one can be sure to which sign he belonged -- but he exhibited attributes of each. Aries, symbolized by the ram; Taurus, by the bull. Individual will and unflinching determination. The runic symbol for the ram is *feoh*; for the bull, it's *ur*." He lowered his voice. "Unite them, and you have *feohur* -- or in German, the term for leadership . . . *fuehrer*!"

Hugin found himself shuddering violently in the cold new night. "*Mein Gott*, what have ancient runes to do with anything?" Facts he believed chased from memory swarmed in Hugin's throbbing head. "What do they have to do with why you brought me out here?"

Munin answered in a whisper. "Only everything," he said. "The runes were forerunners of alphabets. They were the 'letters' of the Teutonic tribes of Germany. Remember that Adolf held the composer Wagner's music of myth in high esteem." His half circle of death's-head teeth flashed. "The Teutons were thought to be exterminated by the Romans 102 years before Christ in Gaul -- which became, in part, France! However, the Teutonic Knights -- established 1198 -- invaded and Germanized Prussia. In 1410, it was a combined *Polish* and *Lithuanian* army that believed it had vanquished all Teutons!

And, in 1850, the Corsican Frenchman Napoleon believed the same when *he* conquered a single Teutonic branch! Hugin, consider the references I've made to Prussia, Rome, Lithuania, Poland, France, whom Hitler loathed and invaded. Then consider the Fuehrer's remark: "We are not a movement, we are a *religion*." What d'you make of that, eh?" Munin's neck straightened. "The magic of Teutons was unfailingly set in motion by conjuring storms. You remember Storm Troopers, don't you?"

"What is your *point*?" Hugin demanded.

Munin stood erect before the oak and peered at the almost innumerable graves spreading toward the horizon at the foot of the hill. "*Wotan*."

"Who?"

"It comes from the racially pure Scandanavian 'Odin,'" he replied. His cold blue eyes flickered. "In Wagner's opera *Walkure*, Fuehrer's favorite, Siegmund and his sister Sieglinde are the twin children of . . . Wotan. Wednesday -- the day of the *week* -- was named for him

You're seriously proposing that Adolf Hitler based his party's deeds on beliefs that have held slight importance for over one-hundred years? I fear that sounds -- quite mad.

who ruled heaven and earth, wisdom and war!" In his enthusiasm he clapped Hugin's arm. "Wotan, god of the sky, of culture and mythology -- and *runic writing*! Friend, in the Sprach-Brockhaus dictionary, 'mythos' is defined as 'a symbolic idea with *life-renewing force*.' So it is!"

Hugin groped for cigarettes, worked one to his mouth. "You're seriously proposing that Adolf Hitler based his party's deeds on beliefs that have held slight importance for over one-hundred years? I fear that sounds -- quite mad."

"Arcane knowledge has driven men to madness," Herr Munin said without rancor. A lighter in his black-gloved hand flared up like flame at a rally. "The fatherland has produced Paracelsus, Agrippa, Mesmer, Bohme. Occult interest here should not come as a surprise. Eh?"

"Perhaps you're right." A nod acknowledged the light. "The runes you mention . . . ?"

"It derives from *rauen*, a Low German term meaning 'to carve.' Runes weren't ever meant to become a true alphabet."

"What use were they then?" asked Hugin over the smouldering tip of his cigarette.

"They were for the use of creating a futhorc, Hugin," Munin replied. "A word suggesting both a means of predicting as well as shaping the future. For a thousand years . . . "

"Blood is the cement of civilization."

"We should begin drawing this to a close." Chilled to the bone now, Hugin was more frightened and apprehensive than he let on. "Your ideas, I confess, are intriguing. You think that certain celebrated people regarded generally as evil were summoned by eternal forces from this garden of the dead -- that they were meant to fulfill the prophecies or plans of this Wotan?"

"Wotan lost an eye to a water god named Mimir but, in doing so, acquired omniscience. Hitler's hair was brushed so that it fell to his eye. Mimir kept what was known as the well of wisdom, and Wotan sought it. Perhaps he was not alone."

Hugin shivered. "You know where the well is located, don't you?"

"To a degree. At the roots of Yggdrasil, the tree of the universe . . ." Now Munin reached to a lower branch of the oak, caressed it lightly with the tips of his gloved fingers. "A rumor has it that Adolf Hitler shot himself to put out the eye and become . . . immortal. *Self-renewing.*"

"Come, Herr Munin!" Hugin snorted. "What evidence could there be for that?"

"Let me see," Munin said dreamily. "There's a painting anybody can go see, *Die wilde Jagd*, the work of an artist named Franz von Stuck. In it, a huntsman is shown in the midst of starved corpses, ravaged women and -- note this -- decapitated heads. The principal figure has severe eyes, a large nose, a small and neat mustache -- and a lock of brown hair drooping over the temple. Wearing a crimson cape, clutching a bloodied sword, he is the artist's conception of -- Wotan." Munin positively beamed. "Further images were present and in the lower lefthand corner of the painting one sees the artist's name, and the date that it was completed." Munin appeared so happy. "1889, the year of Adolf Hitler's birth."

"Why babble about brutality and be indignant about tortures?"

"It is a fact," Munin added, "that the Fuehrer saw that painting."

Sweat poured from Hugin's forehead despite the cold. "I still don't see why you wished me to come to this cemetery, this hill -- this tree."

"In *Isaiah* it's written that idols were made from oak wood. Druids worshiped oak, conducted rites beneath it. Why, their very name comes from the Celtic daur, or oak." He brought his long arms down from the branch, raised his collar so high that face and head were

swallowed by the garment; hidden. "They say Druids believed in human sacrifice, Hugin; in the transmigration of the soul . . . in immortality." His voice was oddly muffled. "Wotan owned two ravens who possessed the power of transformation to other life forms. One had the task of *remembering* old friend. That, too, can drive one to madness. His name was -- Munin."

"You?" Suddenly he did not wish ever again to see clearly the face of the man who had stayed in Germany through the decades, he who had welcomed him home as if he had been a long lost brother.

"I." His back was turned now. "And you, old friend, have forgotten the duty of the second raven. It was to think. It's name--"

"Was *Hugin*," sobbed the smaller man. "I do recall . . . part . . . of the awful past."

"Let me help you remember it all! Such as the secret knowledge that while the Hopi and Incan swastika was the reverse of ours, also created in the woods, ours symbolizes a gnarled, oaken root. It is the *final* runic carving."

Hugin shrank from the tall form as he turned. The black SS coat rose from the sides like wings. If he could only remember how to make the transformation, Hugin thought! But he'd found it impossible to continue thinking about a living Hell.

"Our planned future, our *futhorc*, was sired the year of the English Ripper called Jack. His own carvings foretold our leader's coming, Hugin. Note that his last slaughter of a whore was on November 9, 1888; Jack dissected her and escaped though drenched in blood. On that same day in 1923, Adolf Hitler swore that his enemies would 'drown in a bloodbath' and spoke of the sacred 'blood flag,' established the Blood Order . . . and began training SS men to conduct *their* experiments upon the useless, bleeding innocents."

"Please, Munin!"

"August 31, 1888, 'Jack' ripped Polly Nichols from throat to belly after first cutting her throat. On that anniversary in '39, the Fuehrer issued his official 'Order for the Destruction of Lives Which are Unworthy of Being Lived' -- and began World War II. It was on September 8th the year before his birth that the prostitute Annie Chapman's windpipe was severed, her head nearly falling off when a handkerchief round her neck was removed. That month, as boy, Hitler *dreamed* of having his own Reich and conceived *two goals*. The first, old friend, was . . . the total eradication of *prostitution!*"

"Stop!" Hugin circled to the other side of the huge oak. "I remember more and more." And the pain of thinking it was unendurable.

Munin paused. "You observe the renewal of zeal from 'Jack' to Hitler, the expansion of boundaries from Britain to Germany? D'you recall that the *first* murder in London in 1888 -- while experts have never formally acknowledged it as the work of the Ripper -- occurred

one year to the day before our leader's *mutter* went into labor to deliver him?"

"Yes, I do, I *truly* do!" The fellow's voice, Hugin realized, was a snarl; he heard it telepathically as the cloaked form followed and dropped into a crouch. "Mumin . . . I wanted to forget."

"You cannot! Time is being collected, now. It must have consequences! Hitler's birth, '89; the South African Boer War in '99 -- see the way endings culminate and return! See that the end of each decade speaks for the future even as does the end of the century!" His eyes burned from the encompassing collar the glowing red within the Nazi banner. "1909, Jung conceived the collective unconscious, went to America with Freud, and parted; that year a coal mine explosion killed 259 laborers in Illinois, and a hurricane devastated portions of two southern United States, leaving 350 dead. And 1919, Hugin," Munin growled, "was the year when the infamous Versailles Treaty was signed! The year our Fuehrer met occultist Dietrich Eckhart as a boy and developed the latent magic of his speaking. '29, the collapse of the U.S. stock market; '39, Hitler began World War II; '49--"

"I'm a *man*, damn you, not a bird -- not a beast!" But Hugin had backed as far from the creature as possible without rolling down the hill. "I will remember no more!"

"But you must! You shall recall Hitler mentioning the 'little voice' that warned him, always, of danger; his boyhood in Linz when he stood before the trees near Leonding, and *spoke to them* -- then confessed his fantasy that *he was Wotan, ruler of the universe!*" Munin raised his head but he was in shadow. "Those trees were oaks!"

Hugin's shaking arms grasped the tree as he sank to his knees. "I can't deny it." There was no escape from the past or its messenger, he saw. "Would that God had done so."

"One creature drinks the blood of another."

"He whom you beseech grants freedom, answers when called. We were subjects of a different lord." The thing, arms in black, upraised -- if they still were arms -- stood above Hugin. "Remember everything! As a youth in Vienna, Adolf first saw the child's volume of Nordic gods, read a book of archeology linking them with the German tribes. He called his dog 'Raven,' and knew that he wished to be an *Architekt* -- and a god of destruction."

"What will you have me do?" He could no longer look up at the terror.

"To think, as before -- to assist me in bringing back the existence of the men who lie in these graves. To help restore our Reich! Read *this*."

A scrap of aged paper fluttered to the ground where Hugin knelt. Picking it up, he saw that a poem was written on it in hand. He mumbled the words as he read aloud:



"I often go on bitter nights to Wotan's Oak
In the quiet glade, with dark powers
To weave a union,
The runic letters the moon makes with its magic
spell."

The rest was missing. Hugin glanced up. Instead of a raven, he saw the face of a silver wolf, slavering. Its strange blue eyes were red-rimmed and insane but shone with savage and ferocious intelligence.

"The 'further images' in von Stuck's painting of Wotan were," Munin explained to Hugin's mind, "of great wolves. The poem -- it was written by a corporal in a trench, during the first world war."

"Der Fuehrer?" asked the kneeling man in a hoarse, terrified whisper.

The lupine head nodded; lowered. "To weave a union," he growled from inches away, "in blood that spatters messages of fear on the trunks of ancient oaks.

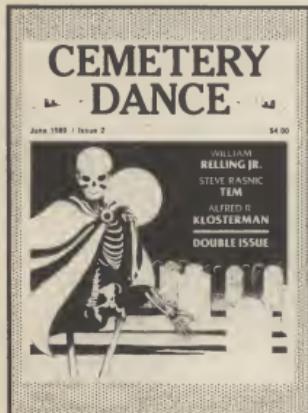
So shall you assist me in accomplishing the true death of this century and in collecting its signal moments. For renewal."

He tore out Hugin's throat without waiting for a reply, devoured it, left the untransmogrified head teetering on shreds of flesh and gradually collapsing spinal column. Droplets of blood rained on the roots of the oak as well as the trunk, and seeped into the well of Earth as a mammoth raven rose into the air to watch for the plots of impermanent death to quake.

Soon the century would end, be collected. Judged. Infinite cruel madness sat upon a branch of Wotan's oak and waited for the consequences.

"The Germans in particular seem to have found the Ripper a symbolic figure."

-- Colin Wilson, *Encyclopedia of Murder*



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J. N. WILLIAMSON TRIBUTES

A QUESTIONABLE CHARACTER

by
Robert Bloch

Whenever writers gather to discuss their craft, there is generally almost unanimous agreement on a salient point -- aspirants to literary careers almost inevitably begin their endeavors at an early age. At which point someone usually raises the inevitable question -- "What about J.N. Williamson?"

While Jerry wasn't exactly a geriatrics case when he made his vow, it's impossible to ignore his advancing years when one sees Jerry at tricks today.

Another classic axiom beloved by the auctorial community is "Those who can't write, teach." Again -- what about J.N. Williamson? He is living (and thriving) disproof of this gross canard. And his writing *is* teaching, in a way, because if studied it contains valuable lessons for all of us who are his colleagues.

So there's only one answer to "What about J.N. Williamson?"

He's a writer, and a good one.
Unquestionably!

SCARY FRIEND

by
James Kisner

A few years back, I wrote an introduction to one of Jerry Williamson's chapbooks, opening it with the remark, "J.N. Williamson scares me."

I could not think of any better tribute then, because I had encountered in his fiction genuine scares, while the "scares" in most other writers' fiction seemed plastic, contrived and tepid.

I can't think of no better tribute now.
Jerry still scares me. Because he is not content

with easy scares, such as gross-outs or gratuitous splatter. He tries something new in each book -- continuing to maintain a level of originality most writers don't even attempt. He is one of the great innovators in modern horror fiction.

I've also been lucky enough to become one of Jerry's friends, which means more than anyone can possibly imagine. Because Jerry is of the old school -- believing that being a friend means you help people when they need it, even if you have to set aside your own work and concerns.

He's offered comments and advice on my own writing when I really needed some ego-boosting and could not find it; he's gone out of his way to do things to help me -- and many other writers -- along in their careers. The way he is willing and able to do this while creating a body of work that seems impossible to be the output of only one man -- is, in itself, rather scary.

But that's what you'd expect from Jerry Williamson. He always delivers. To his readers. And his friends.

JERBO

by
William F. Nolan

That's my special nickname for him: "Jerbo" (Jerry boy), and to him I'm "Wuffin" (generated by my initials, W.F.N.). Silly, right? Sure, but silliness is often fun and Jerry Williamson enjoys being silly (having fun) on paper and in life. The full-time writing profession is all too often a very grim business indeed, so one tends to lighten the load whenever possible. We have a running gag about yard worms (shared by Jerry's wife Mary) which is far too complex (and silly) to get into. Suffice to say, it has provided many a wild chuckle between us.

With me living in Los Angeles and Jerry in Indianapolis, we had never met when he wrote me late in 1983, asking for a contribution to the first of his now-classic

Masques anthologies. I responded with "Trust Not a Man" -- and the friendship was rolling. I met the Williamsons for the first time in October of 1984 at the Tenth World Fantasy Convention in Ottawa, Canada. Immediately, in Jerry and Mary Williamson, I recognized two of life's Good People. We were jabbering like old pals when the weekend was over.

What's Jerry like in person? Think of a large elf with glasses, a wide grin and a mop of gray hair and you've got him.

Jerry and I have now celebrated four world cons together, from Tucson to Nashville, and we'll be celebrating our fifth this year in Chicago. Each has been memorable -- and they have been bridged by a growing mountain of exchanged letters. In my preface to Jerry's superb terror tale, "The Book of Webster's" in *Urban Horrors*, I commented on his letters: "They jump out of the mailbox and land on your chest like eager pups, demanding attention."

No exaggeration. Jerry doesn't write a letter, he explodes on paper. His words gallop across the page as he loosens a multitude of enthusiasms, giving them full rein.

Jerry is an emotionalist. If you're his friend he'll bust a gut for you. He wants you to be well, happy, creative . . . Your good news about the latest book sale cheers him mightily; he genuinely *cares*.

But what do I think of him as a professional writer?

His best work blows me away: stories such as the aforementioned "The Book of Websters," and his deeply-felt post atomic jewel, "The House of Life" -- and terrific, totally-engrossing novels such as *The Longest Night*, *Ghost*, *The Black School*, et al. (Can't wait to read his upcoming *Monastery*.) Not to forget that he's a hell of an editor, proven by his outstanding *Masques* series.

Let me put it simply: at his best, J.N. Williamson is one of dark fantasy's most engaging storytellers, a protean talent who keeps getting better each year. He's a credit to the genre.

Cheers, Jerbo!

And tell Mary the worms say "Hi!"

emergence as a writer in horror and other genres; we collaborated on a novel, *Wards of Armageddon* (Leisure, 1986); we worked together on the well-known *Masques* anthology series.

Jerry started late, as I did. His voice is as distinct as Lovecraft's in genre often filled with formula prose. His output is remarkable, as have been his usual high spirits in the face of adversity. Above all, the romance of writing has never left him. I'm reminded of Stephen Vincent Benet's eulogy for F. Scott Fitzgerald: "You can take off your hats now, gentlemen, and I think perhaps you had better." But J.N. Williamson is very much alive; he keeps on!

"UNDERSTANDING"

by
Rex Miller

Jerry Williamson, whom I'm crazy about as a writer, and tremendously fond of as a friend, understands. Perhaps that's his forte: understanding. He understands the human condition.

While J.N. Williamson and I couldn't be more different as writers, (his tool is the laser, mine is the jackhammer), we share a lot of mutual prejudices. Our favorite book of the Bible is Ecclesiastes, for instance. Our favorite writer on writers is apparently E.L. Doctorow, who writes:

"What we call fiction is the ancient way of knowing, the total discourse that antedates all the special vocabularies . . . Fiction is democratic. It reasserts the authority of the single mind to make and remake the world."

That's the opening quote Jerry chose to illuminate the purview of his 1987 work *How To Write Tales of Horror, Fantasy & Science Fiction*, and it says as much about Williamson as it does about the brilliant Doctorow. Williamson understands writing, and -- as much as we allow ourselves to be understood -- writers. He likes us, Jerry does. The long, the short, and the tall. A lot of his time is spent reading, talking with, and trying to help writers. He's famous for it.

If there's such a thing as karma, let's hope it all comes back around to rest on his doorstep this year; all the long waits for checks that never came or came too little or too late; all the hassles he's weathered in the name of his art; all the inequities and outrages and cruelties he's suffered -- just to be a professional in this maddeningly wonderful racket. May it all come back around to Jerry in the form of kudos, awards, heavy duty advances, mainstream penetration, breakout acclaim, major numbers, and Happy Trails.

"THE SERIES BOMBED: OUR FRIENDSHIP DIDN'T"

by
John MacLay

I first met Jerry Williamson in the fall of 1982, when he responded to a *Writer's Digest* notice about a series of short novels I was planning to publish. The series bombed; our friendship didn't. He guided my

But even if none of those things happen in this sometimes unjust and often imperfect world, J.N. Williamson will still be writing, and his work will keep improving. And he will understand.

J.N. WILLIAMSON: FROM HOLMES TO HORROR

by
Thomas Millstead

Holmes, not horror, first brought me face to face with J.N. Williamson while we were still in our teens. The adolescent Jerry had founded the Indianapolis Sherlock Holmes society, the Illustrious Clients, and I was co-founder, in Wisconsin, of an organization devoted to Simon Templar, the Saint. We met because Jerry shared my interest and I, his.

Over subsequent decades, our relentless and uninterrupted correspondence has chronicled, in often agonizing detail, the progression of our lives. Among Jerry's hundreds of letters some run to 18 pages, single-spaced. Leafing through them now, a story -- a saga -- unfolds: The journey of a driven youth growing steadily stronger and wiser, through brutally rough and chilling times, into a maturity that finds him one of the genuine masters of the dark arts of fiction.

On that journey, he played many roles: soldier, magazine editor, professional astrologer, computer software salesman, vocalist. As to the latter, I well recall besieging disc jockeys to plug a record Jerry had cut ("Mister Who." It did not become a top-40 favorite.)

Yet this crazy-quilt of careers honed his knowledge of the real world, of real people and their real joys and terrors. And all the while, beneath the surface, a ferocious need was bubbling. It burst forth in the mid-1970s with his first book -- and clear evidence that he had at last arrived where destiny intended him to be all along.

As I wrote in a foreword to a collection of Jerry's short stories, *Anomalies*: "He is a genial man . . . a family man, a dog-lover, a homebody, a sports enthusiast, a believer in traditional values." Yet he knows "the many forms that horror can take . . . he has crafted his creations artfully, with inspired ingenuity, profound insight and even a touch of poetry."

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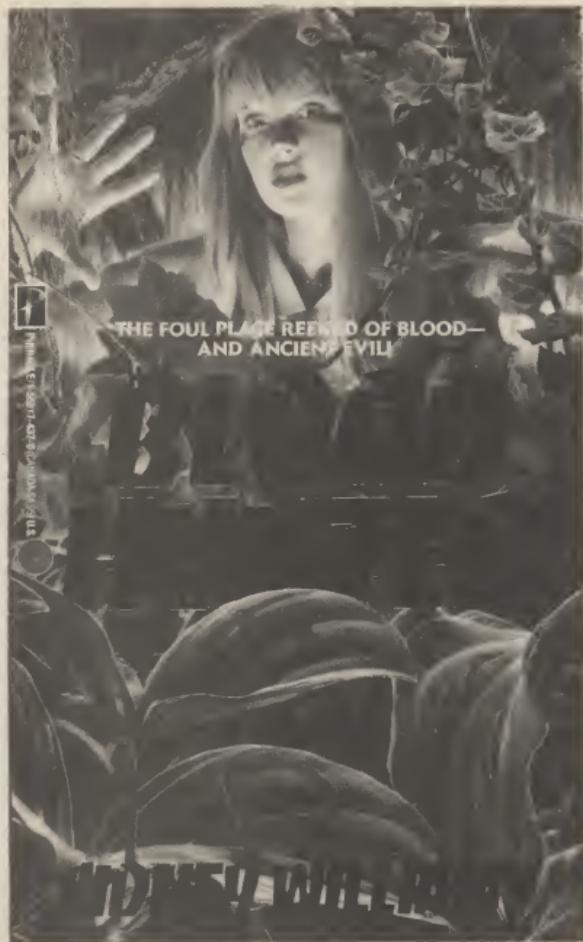
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NIGHTLIFE

It came from the Venezuelan rain forest . . . a potent new drug called skullfish that makes cocaine look mild by comparison. Originating out of Yanomamo Indian tribal mysticism, sufficient dosage brings about bodily changes rooted in the user's primal spirit animal. And now six kilos have hit the Florida shores, winding up in Tampa with second-generation Columbian-American Tony Mendoza, a mid-level coke distributor with aspirations for the big time.

Tony's got his hands full, trying to kill Justin and April, two loose ends who know just how powerful a drug he's got and are risking everything to stop him. As well, a lone Yanomamo is hacking his way north, following the path of the drug taken from his homeland. In this chapter, Tony — whose spirit animal happens to be a piranha — exploits skullfish's possibilities to challenge Rafael Agular, the main roadblock on his rise in the drug world.

-- Brian Hodge

CHAPTER 27

Dusk was deepening over Tampa as the Lincoln cruised south along Bayshore Drive. Tony loved this jaunt at night, gorgeous view. It was better when you were in the northbound lanes and downtown lay ahead like a promise, but he could always turn around. See the lights, the skyline, in retreat. And all that water to the east, rippling black and silver beneath the rising moon. What secrets it must hold.

Lupo continually checked the rearview mirror, once every several seconds. He seemed satisfied.

"Okay back there," Tony asked.

Lupo nodded. "If we had a tail, I would've spotted them by now. I'm taking it like a maze tonight."

Standard precaution for business trips that fell a bit beyond the realm of ordinary. Not like this afternoon, when Lupo had grown a tail, knew it, and didn't mind one tiny bit.

That too was business a bit beyond the ordinary.

Tony felt as if he were fighting a low-grade war, on

two fronts. Justin and April, on the one hand. And on the other, Tampa's big cheese himself.

Rafael Agular lived far south on Bayshore in one of the city's most exclusive neighborhoods. Perched on the edge of the Bay like that demanded substantial dollar investment, but he could surely afford it. Directly or indirectly, Agular controlled a full eighty percent of the cocaine flow into the area.

His house was new, modern, its architecture composed of intersecting and overlapping cubes, all a pristine white. In emulation of Hugh Hefner's hedonistic tendencies, Agular had constructed a man-made pond, complete with low rock cliffs and a waterfall at one end. A splendid place for entertaining of all orientations, the playground was shielded from neighbors' curious eyes by a surrounding thicket of palms and banyans. Security was further enhanced by a nine-foot brick wall circling the estate, its top ledge studded with broken glass imbedded in poured concrete. According to Santos, photoelectric eyes were spaced at intervals along the walls. If a beam between them was broken, the security staff inside knew where, and could zoom in with a closed-circuit camera to cover the breach in an instant, while at the same time drenching the area with floodlights.

The Lincoln stopped at the front gate, overseen by two guards in suits. No problems, he was expected. The steel latticework gate swung open at the middle, and they were in.

Agular's drive was heavily tree-lined, a curving affair designed to prevent a straight open view of his house from the gate and the street. That passion for privacy. Tony compared the layout from the map with the real thing as the Lincoln rolled in. One camera on the drive from up at the gate. Gradual curve to the left, then a straightaway toward the house. One more camera mounted near the house to cover the straightaway. Tony called the overhead diagram to mind . . . angles, curves, areas of visible coverage. On the inside of the curve, there should be a crescent of roughly fifteen feet that was pure blind spot. Covered by neither camera.

He had just pinpointed Agular's Achilles heel.

Lupo parked on an asphalt oval before the house, and they were admitted by a goon who was every bit Lupo's equal in size. Must have had his suits custom tailored. Tony and Lupo submitted to the indignity of a

quick frisk, and had had the foresight to leave weapons in the car. Tony wondered if, in their absence, guards would emerge from hiding to search the car. Depended on how paranoid Aguilar was today. Cocaine could bring it on, make you fear enemies that weren't there. And, on the bright side, fuck up with enemies that were.

Even if the car was searched, they wouldn't find anything to worry them. Lupo's MAC-10 and straight razor, a Browning automatic Tony often carried. No heavy firepower, just tools of the trade. Just those . . .

And a four-foot coil of nylon rope in the glove compartment. Innocent enough, just simple rope.

"You can wait here," the doorman told Lupo, and his voice was a rumbling bass from a tomb.

Tony nodded to Lupo, let yet another guy who materialized lead him deeper into the house. How Aguilar kept them all straight Tony didn't know. Guys all looked alike, short hair and suits, most of them looking to have steroid dependencies.

Whatever you could say about Aguilar -- greedy, a stubby obese pig of a man, paranoid -- he lived in fine style. Tony was led from the entry hall through a large arched portal. Past an open, airy sprawl looking up two stories to the ceiling. A curving balcony ran along one wall, and the first floor was built on two different levels linked here and there by four-step stairways. The walls and balcony and its railing were eggshell, the carpet and walkway tile were pale gray. Most of the furniture was a darker gray, and in one corner sat a gleaming white Bosendorfer grand piano.

Style. What a waste, considering the owner.

The aide led Tony into a branching hallway, down to one end, and stopped before a closed door. He rapped twice.

"Come," said a voice from the other side.

The aide poked his head in, "Tony Mendoza. Still wanna see him?"

"Yeah."

The aide fell behind Tony as they entered Aguilar's den. More eggshell and grays, even a smooth gray desk made of some plastic polymer. The wall behind Aguilar held huge windows of thick cubes of translucent glass, now shiny black with the newfallen night.

Another wall held a seven-foot tarpon, mounted. They were fighters like Ali was a boxer. Tony had heard Aguilar's version of the catch, also knew the real story. The fishing charter in the Gulf where Aguilar had hooked it and then let one of his steroid monsters wrestle the thing all afternoon, until it had about two minutes of fight left inside those silver scales. He'd pulled it on board and posed for pictures like he was sweating testosterone. Just looking at the thing made Tony want to vomit.

"You want me to stay?" asked the aide.

Aguilar gave a curt shake of his cannonball head. "Outside the door."

Tony heard the door latch behind him, waited for Aguilar to tell him to sit. Fat bastard. Still, best to keep on his good side at this crucial stage. Tony fought the urge to laugh. In the man's presence, he felt especially dark and sleek in black slacks, black shirt. Aguilar, on the other hand, was taking this Hefner crap too far. Sitting behind his desk in silk pajamas. All he needed was a pipe.

At least Hef managed to project something of the debonair. Aguilar looked more like a child molester. Sawed-off porker with thick fingers and lips, a hairline receded back to the crown of his head. He grew it long on one side, combed it over the sweaty gleaming dome, thought no one would notice.

"Go on, go on, take a load off." He jabbed one thick finger at the chairs before his desk.

Tony sat while Aguilar studied him with beady pig eyes. Tony noticed white flecks beneath his nose. Still dipping into his stockpile too much for his own good.

Achilles heel number two.

"Thank you for seeing me," Tony said, smooth as butter.

Aguilar sniffed. "I figured, if nothing else, it might be good for a laugh. I'm not used to guys way down in your little sewer wanting to meet. I hear, hey, he's asking around to my guys about a meet, what the fuck does *he* want?"

Tony smiled. Harvard M.B.A., a real charmer. "I have a present. A token of appreciation."

Suspicion and delight filled the man's eyes, equal measures. Schizoid. Tony reached into a shirt pocket and withdrew a clear glass vial, set it on his desk, then folded his hands.

Aguilar frowned. Checked the light. Bent in closer to peer at the thing. "What the hell . . . ?" He picked it up, turned it this way and that.

"Pretty, isn't it?" Tony said. "You act like you never saw the stuff before."

"Don't be a dickbrain. Where the hell did you get this? And what the hell is it?"

Tony feigned the look of a man suspecting he heard a joke and wasn't sure it was funny. "Are you serious? You were supposed to know all about this a few weeks ago."

Aguilar stared at the vial, then popped it down onto the desktop. Drummed his fist beside it for a moment. Hurriedly reached into a desk drawer and pulled out a nickel-plated revolver, ivory grips with scrimshaw inlay. Tony didn't bat an eyelash as Aguilar waved the gun at him.

"Yeah? Yeah? Well, I don't." Fat man was sweating more, his nose twitchy as a rabbit's. "Why don't you educate me."

Placatingly, Tony spread his hands. Kept his voice soft, hypnotically smooth. Here sits a reasonable man. "I got six keys of that a few weeks ago. Directly from Luis

Escobar."

Agular perked up further at Escobar's name. His death early last week had been big news statewide, although everybody on both sides of the law still seemed to be scratching their heads over it. His bookend bimbos hadn't been much help in figuring it out. A wet man with golden brown skin and black hair, that was all they could agree on. Great, detain Latin America for questioning. A real pro job, though, and the hitter had some twisted passion for novel ways of whacking people. Some rival importer's doing, no doubt. Competition for Escobar's throne had been a hard, fast, and bloody scramble. Dade County was in definite turmoil.

"Escobar said you weren't interested in handling this stuff. Skullfish, it's called." Tony shrugged. "I know, I know, I thought it was screwy, myself. But what, I'm gonna call him a liar?"

Agular's jaw was clenched as he stared at his desk top. He began spinning the revolver's cylinder while shaking his head. "That dead fuck, Escobar. That dead fuck. Didn't say dick to me about this, didn't say *dick*!"

"My source for it has dried up," Tony continued, "and so naturally I turn to you. I was hoping to find someone with longer arms than I've got, help keep my customers happy."

Agular was nodding, sweat glazing his skull, bead-ing over his upper lip to make a watery paste of the residual coke smeared there. From another drawer he pulled a larger vial of his own, and a tiny gold spoon. He loaded each nostril twice and shut his eyes and groaned. Rolled his eyes open again. Watery, bleary, bloodshot.

"I'll check into this," he said.

"At least I brought you a token taste." Tony nodded toward the vial of green. "Enjoy."

Agular's eyes narrowed. Ever suspicious, poisoners in my midst. "You first."

"You know I never touch the stuff."

"Make an exception."

Tony had fully expected this. He held out his hand for, and received, the gold spoon. Snorted a load into each nostril and shuddered distastefully for image's sake. His mind was momentarily swimming by the time he recapped the vial. The dosage hadn't been enough to bring on the change, just a heady light show.

Agular nodded, nonplussed. "I'll see what I can do."

"Careful with that stuff. Very pure, it's uncut." He rubbed the bridge of his nose. "Packs a punch at first, but worth it, I suppose." He paused. "If you're into that sort of thing. Not my cup of tea, personally."

Agular sniggered wetly.

"My gratitude."

"Andy? *Andy*!" Agular bellowed, and the guy outside the door reappeared. "See Tony out. And leave me the fuck alone tonight. Anybody bothers me, I'll have his balls for paperweights."

Tony bid the pig goodnight and dutifully fell in step with Andy as they retraced their steps. He would have given anything to read Agular's thoughts right now, seeds of panic sprouting in the muddle of his mind. Groping for reasons as to why Escobar had shut him out on skullfish distribution. He had to be wondering if he was ready to be set up for the high and mighty plunge because of his own addictions. So the Medillin cartel had dealt with one of its own, Carlos Lehder. Set him up for capture when his head got too full. Quickly extradited, and now doing life at a U.S. federal prison.

Things would surely look bleak to Agular, at the moment. And no better way to perk up sagging spirits than chemically. With whatever happened to be at hand.

Tony collected Lupo at the door and they were ushered out. Night had become complete. They got into the Lincoln, Lupo fired the ignition, and they were slowly rolling to loop around and head back out the drive.

"Did he buy it?" Lupo asked.

"Oh yeah." Tony laughed, going for the rope in the glove compartment. "I bet his shorts are full of bricks by now."

One end of the nylon rope had already been tied into a tight loop, and this he slipped over the handle of the passenger door. Fed the other end into Lupo's right hand. Should be just enough slack.

Their headlights cut twin cones of brightness through the drive, already dimly lit by a gauntlet of small sodium globes. All the better for the cameras. Lupo kept the speed down, a steady six miles per hour. As they neared the curve, he hung as far inside as he could without it looking overdone.

Tony unlatched the door, held it ready. Before leaving the penthouse this evening, he had taped the little button down to prevent the inner light from winking on and the buzzer from going off.

Into the curve . . .

Into the blind spot . . .

"Banzai," said Tony, and pushed the door open far enough to slip out and tumble to the ground beside the asphalt. While Lupo gave a yank on the rope to swing the door shut again. Its clunk was scarcely audible over the engine. No way could the pair of guards at the gate have heard.

Just as surely as they would never know that only one man now sat behind the mirrored windows.

Tony hung in beside the trees while the Lincoln continued its slow, steady trek to the gate. Saw the glow of the brake lights, heard the opening, then closing, of the gate.

Alone, then. Night, and shadows.

According to Santos, the bulk of Agular's closed-circuit cameras on the grounds were mounted to keep watch on the walls. The house was covered, as well, but less thoroughly, mostly the entrances and ground floor windows. Couldn't have *too* many cameras going at once,

or else the guys on monitor duty inside could never keep track of them all.

Tony didn't need doors, didn't need windows. Just shadows, and occasional ground cover. His maps of the grounds had been committed to painstaking memory, his route worked out in advance. And he hadn't chosen black clothing tonight as a fashion statement.

He took his time, worked his way back toward the house, then made a wide sweep around it. Tree by tree, shadow by shadow. In view of Aguilar's den near the back of the house, Tony could see his distorted image through the thick cubes of glass. Bloated and wavy, multiple Agualars still sitting at his desk.

Tony crept all the way into Aguilar's hedonistic playground of gardens and pathways, deck and waterfall and pond. These too were softly lit, and beneath the night sky, both water and grounds became a dreamy tropical oasis.

He pressed on until he came to the furthest back reaches of the screen of trees, then doubled back through thick-trunked palms, ferns, palmettos, banyans. As he neared the perfect, man-made rocky bluff, the noise of the turbine-driven waterfall drowned out whatever faint rustling noises he made.

The rocks, finally. Safety, shelter, and water.

Tony crouched between the sinewy multiple trunks of a twisting banyan and the water's edge, and here he shed his clothes. Everything went into a neat pile. He reached into a shirt pocket and pulled out another vial. Substantially larger than what he'd given Aguilar.

While bringing himself to the brink of change and beyond, he remembered the effects the drug had brought about when he and Sasha had taken it together. The meshing of mind and spirit in some higher plane of existence, the union allowing him to subjugate her will, make it bend to his own. He was born for this. The game was his to win.

And so in the midst of artificial paradise, he became new. The remolding of his head and shoulders into a sleek, scaled bullet. The cavernous mouth rimmed with carnivore teeth. The coarse, webbed hands. Far more effective for certain situations than the old Tony could have ever been.

The water was cool, as inviting as a silken featherbed. He slipped in and beneath its surface with barely a ripple. Free at last to swim and take full advantage of what the gifts of nature redefined had bestowed. Fresh water flowed past gills, infusing them with oxygen more rich than he had ever known with lungs. No orgasm could have ever felt as intense, or lasted as long.

Within his soul, his spirit searched the inner planes for another nearby spark of life. Nothing, yet. He was

content to wait.

The amount he had left with Aguilar would never be enough to bring on the change, even if the man had known of it and willed it. Just enough to open his mind

And leave exposed its vulnerable white underbelly.

Tony dove, he swam. He explored the bottom of the pond, its sand and rocks. He glided beneath the waterfall, heard and felt the pounding roar overhead. Further in, behind the falls, he found a grate recessed into the rocks where water was sucked in and recycled for the spillway. He swam away, skimming bottom . . .

. . . And soon sensed that feather-tickle of a new window opening near his soul. The first terrifying and awe-inspiring steps down someone else's road, illuminated by green powder.

contact

He stroked, he soothed frayed nerves into submission, as gentle and unobtrusive as a guardian angel. Even from out here, Tony could sense Aguilar's quickened heartbeat, then its slowing as he ministered to the fear. Nothing to be afraid of, nothing at all.

With any luck, Aguilar would think the thoughts were his and his alone. Never suspecting them of being spooned.

Soothing . . .

Calm . . .

Tranquil . . .

Nothing but bliss, soft and loving.

Come on in, the water's fine . . .

Tony swam in broad circles at the bottom of the dark, dark water. And, oh, what secrets it held.

While above, there came footsteps. A shedding of clothes. Low groans of someone in the throes of never-ending wonder. Finally, a tremendous splash.

Tony felt the shockwaves from above, minute ripples reaching all the way down, tingling along nerve receptors across his new hide. He didn't even need sight to pinpoint the direction.

He flashed up from the depths, jaws opening, the shark's tooth necklace trailing down against his chest.

Contact.

Hard. Fast. Bloody.

Thrashing, flailing. A flurry of jaws and pyramid-shaped teeth like razors. Screams that gurgled in a throat choking with water.

Tony dragged him all the way under, no longer disgusted by the man's bulk. Not in the least, the more the merrier. He burrowed into gushing warmth, drove the struggling body into the rocks. Nowhere left to go. Aguilar's fingers clutched weakly at the grate.

And moments later, the waterfall began to run red.

-- CD



ED GORMAN

GORMANIA

I wrote my first two novels the year I turned forty. I'd tried to write novels before, innumerable times actually, but they always ended up half-finished and tossed away. Finishing a book became my obsession. But I did better than that. I not only finished two books, I sold them both first trip out.

I was now, I felt, the real thing. A writer.

When I sent in a proposal for a third novel, however, my editor said that he couldn't buy anything more from me till we saw how my first two did. What was I going to do with all this energy and enthusiasm?

At this time, a friend of mine, a paperback original writer, was making a great deal of money from a series he was doing. He was so successful, in fact, that his publisher wanted him to come up with a second series. But how could he write all these books?

He made me an offer, and one that proved to be quite generous. He'd pay me half his advance and two percent of his royalty to write two books in his first series. He explained that this was done quite frequently, busy series writers farming out work to beginners like me.

I was grateful for the opportunity and not just for the cash, which at the time was more than I was receiv-

ing for books under my own name. I'd wanted to try westerns anyway and this seemed a good way to earn some money and see if I liked the form.

I did two books in six months. His criticism of my work was constructive and helpful, his payments were prompt, and when the books appeared he sent me several copies of each for my files. In other words, the guy was a god damned saint and that's the truth.

Eventually, of course, my own publisher did ask me for more books. I took on a partner in my ad agency and began to devote my mornings to writing fiction in my basement.

But, what with a boy starting college and my ad salary cut at least in half, I was always in need of projects between my own books. My friend, the western writer, was helpful enough to recommend me to other series writers who needed books ghosted for them.

I didn't do many of them -- in all, over four years, I wrote six total -- but I did learn that not all series writers are as wonderful as the western writer.

Take for example the adventure writer.

Here's a guy who's made a very nice living exploiting the Cold War for the past twenty years. What

he'll do now that Mother Russia is presumably our friend, I don't know. He'll probably have his hero become a domestic cop and start piling up bodies in Cleveland or someplace exotic like that.

Anyway, he had just sold a very big spy hardback to a major house and needed one of his series books written quickly to meet a deadline. He phoned and said he'd read two of my books and that he liked one very much and didn't like the other at all. Fair enough except that the novel of mine he liked is a very bad job. The other, while no masterpiece either, is at least written in English with a plot that almost makes sense.

His enthusiasm for my bad novel made me nervous.

But the money was good and I was yet again in a waiting period between books and I was thankful for the job and so I took it.

He asked that I send him the first three chapters as soon as I'd finished them so he could see what I was doing and so I did.

He hated what I wrote. Hated it. The reason? I call it The Great Nipple argument. In the first chapter I had this very attractive young woman stepping out of a swimming pool and the hero looking at her. He happens to notice her breasts and the fact that you can clearly see the shape of her

nipples impressed against the fabric of her bikini top. Nothing really salacious; just an observation.

Well, the adventure writer said, "He wouldn't do that."

"Do what?"

"Notice her nipples."

"Why not?"

"Because he's on a crusade."

"Huh?"

"He's trying to find the bastard who killed his wife eight years ago."

"But he'd still notice her nipples."

"No, he wouldn't."

"He wouldn't?"

"No, Ed, that's where you don't understand this guy. HE'S ON A CRUSADE! HE'S SINGLE-MINDED!"

"When does he get laid?"

"He doesn't get laid."

"He's got to get laid sometime."

"Ed, listen, you're a hell of a nice guy and you've got the makings of a real good writer but I just don't think you know how to handle this Rock Crusher, USMC series. You know what I mean?"

And I had to admit he was right.

Rock Crusher was a figure so heroic he was beyond mortal comprehension.

I returned the advance and we both tried to end on friendly terms, him thinking me this pretentious literary type ("Ed, Jesus Christ, you've got a lot of description in this god damn thing!") and me of course thinking him an imbecilic hack ("You know all these readers give a shit about, Ed? Fireights. You gotta give 'em fireights!")

As Norman Mailer remarked on an argument he'd once had with Nelson Algren, "two middleweights fought to a draw." Or in the case of the adventure writer and I, two bantam weights.

My next experience was much worse. I'm not even sure you'll be-

lieve it in fact but its true (I've got my right hand resting on a stack of Bibles).

After I finished a long horror novel, I got a call from a prominent action writer who said he desperately needed a novel ghosted. He'd agreed to do this western series and had just sold a movie script and now had no interest in the westerns whatsoever. And so virtually any way I wanted to handle it, fine. He hadn't, he said, read anything by me but he'd been told I was some kind of writer, ok. Maybe, I said, he'd better read something by me before offering me this book; I was pretty quirky and some people liked that and some people hated that. Oh no no, he said, I mean I've got friends who think you're really one of the hot new kids and so I don't need to read a book of yours at all.

Ed, Jesus Christ, you've got a lot of description in this damn thing!

You know all these readers give a shit about, Ed? Fireights. You gotta give 'em fireights!

(READ: I don't want to take the time to slog through one of your dreary novels).

So I wrote half the book and sent it to him and a week later, late at night, I received the following phone call:

"It's a good thing I don't live in Cedar Rapids."

"Oh. How come?"

"Because I'd kill you."

Now two things were instantly clear. A) The guy was totally potzed and B) He was serious. Real Serious.

"You didn't like the first half, huh?" I said.

"You have the most decadent, degenerate mind I've ever encountered."

"Jeeze, I don't think I'd go along with that."

"You have him stab somebody in the back."

"That's the only way he could escape."

"And he swears at a woman."

"Huh?"

"In the Code of The West, men always treat women with respect."

"This is a hooker who tried to stab him."

"And then you have him sleep with an Indian woman."

"He was horny," I said. (He had noticed her nipples and one thing had led, alas, to another.)

"He's degenerate. And so are you. I won't pay you a dime for this trash."

And with that, he slammed the phone, thus ending my career as a ghost of series novels.

But the subculture is still there, of course, beginning writers writing the books of established writers who need the time for their "breakout" novels.

Life is very difficult, as my father used to say, and sometimes it makes no sense at all.

(Gorman would never tell you himself -- he's too damn modest -- so I will. Four new Ed Gorman novels have seen print during the past several months -- *Cry of Shadows* (mystery), *Night Kills* (crime), *What the Dead Men Say* (western), and *Nightmare Child* (horror) under the Daniel Ransom penname. -- EDITOR)

ART IS ANYTHING YOU CAN GET AWAY WITH

STEFAN JACKSON writes of himself: "Black male. 6', 180 pounds. Bicycle is main (only) method of transportation. Musician: drummer and keyboards. Currently playing drums for a band called Outburst." Jackson has also sold fiction to *New Blood, Detective Story Magazine, Hardboiled, Noctulpa, Deadly Impulse*, and numerous other publications.

Martin Cole lit a cigarette, drew in tight and hard on the butt. He tossed the lighter back on his desk, it bounced off a couple of photos. Pictures of a fat, dead and skinned man. The corpse had a name: Eddie Jacobs. Age: 39. Residence: 385 Roseland Drive, Phoenix, Arizona. His wife had reported him missing about twenty-six weeks ago. He was found ten days ago in Elmont Park by some kids playing frisbee. Single shot to the head. (9mm. Barrel had to be kissing the temple.) His torso and back were skinned. M.E.'s report suggested that those skinned areas had recently been tattooed. And most exuberantly, as far as Dr. Thomas was concerned, Eddie's wife swear he didn't have any tattoos. The couple had five kids, safe bet she knew her husband's flesh. Eddie used to sell cars at Peabody Dodge. He was a good salesman.

Martin hit the butt again. Let the cigarette dangle from his lips.

He studied the photos and M.E.'s report on Elyana Stevens. 27. Working mother, divorced. Blonde, athletic; played third base for the Blue Angels. A local women's softball team. She had also been french-kissed by the same 9mm. A Luger. And she too had been skinned; legs, torso, back and buttocks. Strong indications that those areas had been recently tattooed. Her four year old son doesn't remember Mommy having tats. Neither does anyone else.

Martin took the cigarette from his lips, set it in the ashtray. He glanced at all the photos and reports on his desk. Seven bodies in all. Kissed by the same Luger, tattooed and skinned. And that's where their connections ended. There were seven tattoo parlors in Phoenix. He had talked to over twenty tattoo artists and scored more "canvases," that is, people who have (wear?) tattoos. Martin couldn't really get a grip on this scene. A lot of the art was indeed fascinating to behold but it was permanent. Always, you wore it everywhere, doing

everything. Never fade away. Martin didn't like that. And he had learned something from an elderly canvas. In Japan, people have clauses in their wills to be skinned when they die. And their families honor the request. The tattooed skin is well cared for, and sometimes sold, if the family has come upon hard times.

Martin softly shook his head, pressed the butt out. Some cultures, strange.

But he wondered if that was what he was dealing with. Was somebody selling the skinned art? This was his project for the now; dive into the art scene.

Martin rubbed his eyes, yawned. He looked around the office; watched his co-workers move about. Languid, quick, sleepy, determined, angry, tired. (Why did we get into law enforcement?)

Martin stood up, pulled his coat off his chair. Started walking. He left his desk in disarray. No one would notice.

**

Phoenix wasn't that strange when it came to art. The galleries were common fare; their curators all looked down on tattoos. Fine art for the military, prison inmates and drug addicts. He got the indication that the Orient was the only region that had any respect for the art form. Well, maybe L.A.

It took Martin a few days to get on the underground track. Violent, sexual, fearless and blatant. Interesting patrons, good information but no solid leads. In fact, Martin believed that he may have given some people a new religion. One punk wondered aloud if your skin would grow back. And if not, you could always get a lot of little tats, skin and frame them. Kinda make a collage. That'd be cool.

**

Martin was skimming through *Interview, BAM, Rocket, Pump* and about a dozen other L.A. and N.Y. based art and trade periodicals. Checking for new, avant-garde artists. Who's making wave or flavor of the month. He might have to do some travelling. Art shows in Cincinnati and Miami really have the locals up in arms. Something new was happening in Seattle. Nothing to do with tattoos but all kinds of people gravitate to view the

controversial. Just to get a taste of it. Martin could meet someone interesting.

A manila folder was slapped down hard on Martin's desk, its contents loosely spilled out. Martin looked up from the magazine and into the ice green eyes of Peter Bines. Racist. With a badge and a gun.

"Got 'nother one for ya, *Super Nigger*." Bines was stern and tight-lipped. "Learnin' anything from those prissy magazines. Ain't filled with nuthin' but freaks and faggots. Artist . . . shit."

Martin stared into a pair of hard orbs. Thought about putting a bullet right between them.

"Ya know, we can handle a case like this. Don't need no federal help. Especially not from some affirmative action monkey."

"This whole district seems to have a problem with race. Did you know you were under investigation for racism? And I'm gonna personally behead you in court." Martin held his nerves in check. "Get the fuck outta my face," he said, low and firm.

Bines sighed, smiled. Adjusted his hat, gunbelt. Posture.

"Do your job boy. Do it right -- then get the fuck outta our town. I'm tired of lookin' at you."

"Then commit suicide . . . BOY!"

The looks could've melted steel. Anger so hot, it blistered the soul. Could almost bring tears to your eyes.

Bines, still smiling softly, gently spun on his heels, slowly walked away. He didn't seem to have any outward support. he didn't get a high five from anyone. But the office was alive and aware. Martin sighed, his stomach tight and surging. He knew what he was walking into -- he just couldn't believe they were so damn smug about it. How high up does this shit run? And is that why no indictments have been handed down yet?

Fuck it. Focus. Your job; your speciality. Finding murderers who get too damn happy. Martin lit a cigarette, drew in tight and hard on the butt.

He looked at the new evidence. Couldn't believe the luck. The corpse had an unfinished tattoo on his back. Martin checked the ballistics memo: same 9mm kiss. He was getting sloppy.

Martin studied the more detailed photos. The tattoo was outlined in dark ink. It was a jungle waterfall scene. The water appeared at the top of the right shoulder then abruptly dropped straight down the spine, exploding into the wading pool at the top of the buttocks, then streamed down the left cheek and faded off onto the left rear thigh. The tattoo was painted in spots; vivid, brilliant colors. The work looked fine to Martin but then he wasn't the artist. Obviously, he wasn't happy with it, or else he wouldn't have thrown it away.

Martin decided to drop by the morgue and get a better look at the corpse. The body was found about seven hours ago, behind Peterson High School. The body, David Meeks, was reported missing three months

ago. He was 24, slight mental retardation. His mother had sent him to the store to get groceries. An easy task that David had done for years.

Martin rose up from behind his desk. He thought about David Meeks, then about Bines. Wondered why the wrong people were always being taken out.

**

Martin walked into *Live Studio*, a tattoo shop in South Phoenix. Seven people were waiting in the lounge, looking at the hundreds of designs on the wall and watching the three artists work with flesh and ink. Three women were amongst those waiting, two of them were alone. All three were pretty. Martin wondered why they wanted to disfigure such lovely flesh. The first pure and sweetest of arts.

The artists all made eye contact with Martin, they gave him a slight nod or wink. He had talked to all of them at one time or another. No one seemed nervous about him being there. He leaned on the hardwood railing. Watched Pat Simms put an Iron Cross on a young skinhead's beefy bicep. The boy gave Martin his hardest stare.

It was beautiful to see that shit in youth. Fucking lovely.

"How you doin' Pat?" asked Martin. He lit a cigarette, offered Pat one.

"Same-ol-same-ol." He took the offered smoke. The fingers of his rubber glove were stained black. Martin lit Pat's cigarette as James Brown pumped through the *Infinities*.

"All art has a style, think you can I.D. one for me?" asked Martin. He pulled a photo from his coat pocket. The pictures didn't really show the body. The lab boys had altered the photo so that the tattoo was more than ninety percent of the picture but still displayed the entire waterfall scene. He waved the photo at Pat.

Pat displayed his hands. Martin realized, ink. He showed Pat the shot. The punk also got an eyeful.

"Doesn't look familiar but it's fuckin' good work. Damn good!" Pat turned. "Yo, Eddie, check this man out!"

Martin walked over to Eddie Tuscatrado. The small, wiry Mexican stared the photo down.

"Fuckin' tough. Who did it?" he asked.

Martin smiled. "I was hoping you could tell me."

"Sorry man. Maybe Shel can help you." Pat pointed at the back wall. "We got a studio in the back. Shel is doin' a guy's back right now. Step over the chain, knock on that door over there."

Martin did as he was instructed. He heard the idle talk behind him. Apparently the word was out. Everyone knew what he was looking for: some freak with a passion for tats. It seemed to make patrons of the scene uncomfortable; they were eager to help. For as Martin often



made the point, stressed it in fact; what if the guy gets tired of doing the tats himself. Decides to go hunting for finished art. No one wants to be skinned. Like an animal.

Martin walked into the brightly-lit studio. It was small but well ventilated. All the supplies were also kept here. Shel was standing over a male body. The body was laying face down on a well padded hospital gurney. The body only had on a pair of shorts and sandals. Martin edged closer . . .

"How you doin' mate?" asked Shel. He was tall, thin, shoulder-length ash-grey hair. Six earrings in total.

"How you doin', Shel? What are you doin'?"

Shel just smiled, stepped back a pace. Martin got a full view. The tattoo covered the man's back. It was a dragon locked in mortal combat with a winged panther. They were fighting in the sky.

"Chris, meet, ah . . ." Shel paused.

"Martin Cole."

"Sorry mate, I'm not that good with names."

"That's alright. Nice work. How long has this taken and how long before you're finished?"

"Mr. Quiz, eh. O.K. mate. It took one four-hour session just to outline the scene. I'm doin' some detailin' now, I'll start colorin' soon. I figure, about three, maybe four three-hour sessions." Shel shrugged his shoulders.

"Chris, how do you feel? I mean, what goes on in your head?" asked Martin. He stepped around to the

head of the gurney.

"Well, me and Shel do a lot of talking. I can see him work, check out the mirrors." Chris pointed to the wall. Martin knelt down. Three mirrors twisted at the right angles gave Chris a limited but clear view of his back.

"So you guys just bullshit as Shel gets artistic. Hmmm." Martin stood up. Looked Chris over. He was covered with tats. Legs, arms . . . "Is your stomach or chest printed?"

"Not yet, but I got time."

Martin just nodded. Thought about the cigarette he left out in the lounge. He wanted to light another one, then beat the urge down. He pulled the photo out of his pocket, showed it to Shel.

"Whoa! That's some work, mate. You want me to tell you who did it? . . . I can't. I don't know anyone that works like this. This is the ol' style. You know, about twenty different sized needles and that thin, hard ink. This wasn't done with one of these guns." Shel handed a tattoo gun to Martin. The gun was small, fit comfortably in the palm. Its needles were tiny and numerous. It sounded like an electric shaver; that dull drone. He handed the gun back to Shel.

Martin sighed. "So, this style is alien to the scene?"

"Western culture, most definitely. I can't even guarantee that it's still practiced much over in the Orient. It takes too damn long. Very tedious. You've got a

serious artist on your hands. If he worked every day, ten plus hours a day, that outline had to take at least seven, eight weeks. I could do it in about three four-hour sessions."

"Why do you always clock like that? Three four-hour sessions."

"Because most people can't take much more. The process can be uncomfortable. Mind you, I didn't say painful. Although, it does have its moments, but hey . ." Shel smiled and lightly shrugged his shoulders.

"Yeah, it kinda gets tough when the coloring begins," said Chris.

Martin showed Chris the picture.

"Awesome. This is a tattoo? Incredible." Chris studied the photo, ran his fingers over the picture. "I tell ya, this looks a lot like Peabo," he said at length, very softly.

"Who?" asked Martin and Shel, in unison.

"Peabo. He's a Haitian artist, about seventy years old. Modern impressionist. He hit the scene around '46-'47. He's quite well known." Chris was more sure of himself.

"So you're sayin' this looks like the style of a famous artist? Actual oil and canvas kinda guy?" Martin asked.

"Yep," replied Chris. "I teach art at Saddleback Community College. Come by anytime during the week. I'll educate you on Peabo. We can also go over tattoo art. It's got a rich history, you know. Just ask for Chris Syned. Room A-318."

Chris handed the photo back to Martin. Martin took it, wrote Chris's name, room number, and the name of the school on the back of it. Then put it back in his coat pocket.

"Thank you, you both have been a tremendous help. Chris, I'll see you tomorrow. Gentlemen, good night."

"Same to you too, mate." Shel slipped on a pair of rubber gloves.

"I'll be waiting for you then. I should be free around one. I've only got two morning classes tomorrow."

"Count on me then," replied Martin. And he walked out the door.

**

"Any help?" asked Pat. The skinhead was gone. One of the girls, a redhead, was seated before Pat. Pat was rubbing salve on her virgin, right shoulder blade.

"Yeah, I just got another education. Gotta love this job. I'm outta here. Take care."

"You too," said Pat.

Martin walked out of the shop. Hit the streets. He took his windbreaker off, draped it over his arm. The night was warm and dry. It felt good.

**

You can learn a lot in school. Especially when the teacher is really high on the subject and the student is more than willing to learn.

To both Chris's and Martin's amazement, the waterfall tattoo was an exact copy of a Peabo original; circa 1932. It had been a charcoal relief. Very immature. Then again, Peabo was just starting out.

Martin checked into Peabo. Haitian national who owned property in New York, Los Angeles and north of Phoenix. A lot of well-to-do people have winter retreats in Phoenix. But not many spend summers down here.

**

Martin drove to Peabo's house. It was in Sunnyside. Nice area. Clean and wealthy.

He pulled into Peabo's driveway. Parked, got out of the Ford Taurus. Checked out the neighborhood. It was quiet. One could get away with murder here. Hell, one can get away with murder anywhere, he's proven that fact many a time.

Martin spoke into a small recorder. Logged the time and scene.

He walked up to the front door. Knocked.

No answer. So he knocked again. He didn't see a doorbell in sight.

No answer. Two-fifteen in the afternoon. Bright, warm day. Martin sighed, scratched his chest. Then he pulled out a small, hard, thin wire. Jimmied the lock. Walked inside.

The house was cool, almost cold. It was clean, well lit and smartly decorated. Ready for a party or a wake; depending on your mindset. Martin quietly drifted around. He looked at the art; paintings and sculptures, tapestries and painted china.

Martin gave the stairs a quick eye, decided to give the ground floors a clean sweep. He thought about the garage.

In the kitchen, Martin heard the muffled gunshot. Just one report. (One shot to the temple. One lead kiss.) Martin pulled out his service piece. A Colt .45. A classic; strong and true. Direct and as lethal as the Lord's will. It felt good in Martin's hand. He paced slowly toward the garage door.

He pulled out his tape recorder, noted the event.

Martin wondered how a respected, seventy-four year old man got this twisted. And how long has it been going on? Before Phoenix, Martin had encountered only four other similar cases. All in the Utah, Colorado areas. And those incidents happened over four years ago. Did Peabo just go mad? Came to believe that Phoenix had the best flesh around? Flesh that would do more than just accent and compliment his work? Was this the flesh that

was bringing his work to life?

Martin snapped himself out of the trance. Those moments scared the hell out of him. The mind link. Psyche mating. He wanted to spit.

Martin gripped the gun with his right hand, opened the garage door with his left.

Peabo had his back to Martin and he was standing under a large studio light. The garage was dark and roomy, it looked like Peabo was under a street lamp. A body laid still on a makeshift bench/bed. The arms and legs were stiffly tied to the legs of the bench. Martin could see from his position that there was nerve-splitting stress on the victim's skin. It was so taut, you could split it with a butterknife. The gun, the 9mm, was on the work table at Peabo's right. Peabo seemed to be just standing there.

Martin eased in. The door softly shut on its own.

Peabo reached out, his old and stiff fingers pushed aside a multitude of stainless steel needles; dirty with paint and blood. Peabo grabbed a straight razor. Moved back toward the body.

"Put the razor down, Peabo. Put it down ole man!"

Peabo turned around. His eyes were old and under a lot of strain. He couldn't see Martin.

"I said, put . . . the . . . razor . . . down. Stay still and don't make me shoot you."

Peabo stood still. Razor in hand. He was squinting quite hard.

"What is this?" the old man said softly.

Martin came into the light. About three feet from the old man. Gun out and pointed at Peabo's small, taut chest.

"F.B.I. You're under arrest."

Peabo saw Martin, understood. He sighed, lowered the razor. He looked at Martin, not really angry, not really guilty. But sad that he wasn't going to be able to finish the work.

"Put the razor down, please." Martin didn't ease his position. But for a second, out of the corner of his eye, he saw blood trickle from the bullet hole on the left of the victim's head. (The right side of his head was splashed on the bench and was dripping onto the concrete floor.) Then Martin smelled the blood, paints, and the tinny taste of urine. He exhaled, a long, slow breath.

Peabo just stood there. He looked at the victim's back. His art.

Peabo looked back at Martin. His eyes pleaded to be allowed to start, to finish. To remove the skin, set the art free.

"For the last time, put the blade DOWN!"

Peabo started to cry. In time, the razor slipped from his hand and fell to the floor.

• •

Martin had logged six weeks vacation time. He was punching that ticket.

Peabo had already exhibited fifteen pieces of the skinned tattoos. A gallery in New York had the work. A court order kept them from continuing to publicly display the art. The order is being fought in court. But, currently, the gallery is complying with the order. Everybody who has anything to do with art is screaming censorship. (Have they forgotten, or does it matter, how the art was produced?)

The families of the victims, once forensics had determined who the flesh (art) belonged to, wanted nothing to do with the skins. Although one family is suing the gallery for back revenue generated from the exhibit. Other families will probably follow suit.

But none of that matters to Martin. He's on vacation. Trying to find fish in some lake in upstate New York.

- CD



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THIRD EDITION

by Kevin Hancer

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JOE CITRO INTERVIEWS JOHN McCARTY

PEOPLE IN THE SHADOWS

How many people do you know who have made a contribution to the language?

I'm talking about people who have coined a phrase or a word that has actually become part of our contemporary vocabulary.

I only know one such person -- John McCarty.

Although his name might not be a household word, John has been around a good long time, making contributions not only to the English language but to the history of American film and to the horror business in general.

So what term did he make up, you ask?

Well, here's a hint: in 1984 John published a book called *Splatter Movies: Breaking the Last Taboo of the Screen*. This was followed by his *The Official Splatter Movie Guide* in 1989.

Since he began writing professionally in 1978, McCarty has authored eleven books, ranging in subject matter from a biography of John Huston to his latest, *The Modern Horror Film*. Other work has appeared in such periodicals as *Fangoria*, *Video Times* and *Cinefantastique*.

In 1990, after a successful string of non-fiction books, John made what many would consider a remarkable career change. He mutated, changed

from chronicler to creator, moving away from non-fiction with the publication of his first novel, a tense, fast-paced horror tale called *Deadly Resurrection* (St. Martin's Press).

I never know what I'm getting into when I meet horror writers at their homes. I guess I still haven't outgrown the adolescent impulse to stereotype. In retrospect, I can't recall exactly what I expected from the author of *Splatter Movies* and *Psychos*. At worst, the demented carnal confines of Leatherface and his brood, or at best perhaps the Victorian prissiness of Norman Bates.

John McCarty's home in up-state New York, near Albany, was a real surprise. His split level ranch was elegantly furnished with his father's impressive watercolor paintings and his wife Cheryl's extensive collection of antiques. When I arrived, the air was full of enticing cooking odors; Cheryl is also a gourmet cook.

But his office is the best part; it's a movie fan's dream! The 22 by 22 foot room is lined with books and films. I saw such varied titles as Val Lewton's *The Ghost Ship*, *The Music Lovers*, and Walt Disney's *Sleeping Beauty*, recorded in three mediums: film, videotape and laser disc.

One lonely corner is devoted

to his modern office with word processor and fax machine. The rest is a movie theater! He has a 52-inch Sony projection television with high fidelity surround sound.

But for me the biggest surprise was McCarty himself.

Stereotyping again. Ask yourself, what does a horror writer look like?

Not like John McCarty, I'll tell you that. Howdy Doody springs to mind more readily than Freddy Kruegar. Boyish, redheaded, always smiling, McCarty's face would seem more at home in an ice cream parlor than on the jacket of a splatter book.

And Mr. Splatter is a genial and generous host. He laughs easily, sparkles with a ready wit, and demonstrates an astounding knowledge of the horror business.

CITRO: So level with me: did you really coin the terms "splatter movie" and "splatter film"?

McCARTY: Yes. It all began in 1980 when Siskel and Ebert, the self-annointed saints of American film criticism, did a half-hour special on "disturbing" new trends in cinema. I found their views so ludicrous and uninformed that I wrote a rebuttal for a local newspaper which I titled

"Splatter Movies." The article became a book that viewed the evolution of the splatter film in a very clear historical perspective.

I credit George Romero with first using the term "splatter cinema" in an interview. The term captured the essence of the genre, it seemed to me, giving it a sense of outrageousness and fun. So I called my book *Splatter Movies*, which popularized the term to such an extent that even Siskel and Ebert use it these days. The term immediately lets you know what you're in for with that kind of movie, exactly like most genre names do. Like western, film noir, or comedy, "splatter movie" tells you exactly what you're going to see.

These movies started out being called *gore films*, a somber, humorless term. But the majority of these films are outrageous and absurd. It doesn't seem right to apply the term

gore film to something like *Hollywood Chainsaw Hookers*, but "splatter movie" seems just right.

CITRO: I'm surprised you could find a publisher . . .

McCARTY: Well, major publishers weren't even aware of the subject back then. Originally the book was published by a small press located in Albany. They really put their back into it and it sold 10,000 copies. It was so successful that a mainstream publisher, St. Martin's Press, picked it up and I expanded the earlier edition.

Sure, there'd been some books on horror films -- but when most of them got to the subject of what's going on now, they just dropped it. *Splatter Movies* charged right ahead and *dealt* with it! It was the first serious attempt to actually define and

study the genre. Until that book, no one seemed to notice that splatter was evolving, just as other film genres had. Just as film itself had. Film went from almost complete censorship to relaxation of that censorship in the sixties, to censorship's virtual abolition in the seventies. I'm not saying splatter movies are progress, but relaxation of censorship *is* progress. Splatter movies, however, have been one of the results.

CITRO: Outside your honorary title of "Mr. Splatter," you're probably best known as a film historian. What got you into writing books about films? How'd you get started?

McCARTY: I am completely consumed by film and have been since a very early age -- and I mean *really* early. My parents started taking me to the drive-in when I was three, and



John McCarty -- "The King of Splatter"

I didn't sleep or carry-on -- *I watched the movie!* So, they started taking me to indoor theaters around age five. Instead of fidgeting or running up and down the aisles, I sat there transfixed. They were amazed. Around seven, I discovered an old typewriter in the attic and started banging out reviews of every film I saw.

CITRO: At age seven? You must have been some kind of prodigy.

McCARTY: I'm not talking about quality reviews, now. Just things like, "This movie was good. I like it a lot."

CITRO: And you typed these?

McCARTY: I started to teach myself to type at age seven. And I still type the same way!

CITRO: So where'd you go after the reviews. What came next?

McCARTY: A couple years later I started writing my own novelizations. Then I started making films in 8mm when I was nine. Later I went to film school at Boston University with the hope of becoming a writer/director.

CITRO: But you didn't get into making films . . . ?

McCARTY: No. Two years of banging my head against various walls in California convinced me that whatever it took to get my foot in the door, I didn't have. So I came back east and pursued a career in broadcasting. But I made short 16mm films in my spare time to keep my hand in.

I started writing film criticism in earnest around 1969, for all sorts of magazines, and published my first book, about talk radio, in 1978. In the late sixties, early seventies, film started to be taken seriously as never before -- perhaps because more and more colleges were offering serious courses and even degrees in film. Books about film started popping up everywhere. Having immersed myself in the subject practically since

birth, it seemed to me that I was eminently qualified to write such books, and it would be a great outlet. *Splatter Movies* grew out of that, got me an agent, and my "career" was launched.

CITRO: And you've gone on to write a number of successful books about movies. Here's something I've always wanted to ask someone like you: In *The Official Splatter Movie Guide* you list over 430 movies. Do you actually sit there and watch all those films?

McCARTY: Obviously, you can't write meaningfully about a film you haven't seen. So, yes, I've seen every film I've written about.

For *The Official Splatter Movie Guide*, I personally screened and reviewed 350 of the films in it and solicited qualified contributors for the remaining 80. I'll be doing the same thing with Volume 2, which will cover close to 500 films -- though I, perhaps, won't be reviewing as many myself this time around. The idea is to eventually put both volumes together as one book that just about covers the territory, at least for a good many years.

CITRO: How do you get to see such obscure items as *Barn of the Naked Dead* and *The New York Ripper*? How were so many oddball movies made available to you?

McCARTY: By using whatever venue was available: theaters, drive-ins, television, film societies, repertory houses and last but not least, God's gift to the film historian and critic, the video cassette. I hate working from memory because no matter how well you think you remember a film in detail, you always get things wrong. The videotape eliminates this problem, and has been especially valuable to me in my books about splatter because so many splatter movies from all over the world have been released on video -- probably in greater quantity than any other genre.

CITRO: Are there legendary films you've never been able to track down and would love to see?

McCARTY: I'm in love with the silent era. Through television, video and other outlets, it's possible to see almost everything the talkie era has produced -- even if you were born, as I was, well after that era began. But almost 70 percent of the entire output of the silent era is gone forever.

I would kill to see Stroheim's complete *Greed*, but I probably never will unless some collector or archive has the six hours of deleted footage stored away somewhere. I'd really like to see Benjamin Christensen's haunted house movies made for Warner Brothers in the late twenties, but except for *Seven Footprints To Satan*, a print of which is now in the hands of the Museum of Modern Art in New York, they're all gone forever. I'm always on the lookout to complete my silent film education, so those silents which still do exist -- and many do -- are what I'm most interested in seeing.

CITRO: So after more than a decade in the books-about-movies field, why did you finally decide to write a novel?

McCARTY: Though it's been very satisfying to have had my views on the creative work of others published and read, I've always wanted to be a participant as well, not just an observer. So, writing a novel seemed inevitable to me.

What I liked about making my short films was the total control I had. I wrote and directed them, did the photography, editing, sound -- everything but act in them, which would have been impossible with all my behind-the-scenes chores. Had I become a professional filmmaker I would have wanted similar control, which is not the norm in Hollywood or anywhere else.

But as a writer of novels, you can do all that. You write the story, stage it, act out all the parts, edit it for pacing and effect and so on. Even

better, you're not limited by budget, only by your imagination. In fact the novel form can be very cinematic. The celebrated Russian director Sergei Eisenstein showed this in an article about Charles Dickens which he described Dicken's use of flashbacks, jump cuts, dissolves and all sorts of cinematic techniques in his novels -- techniques which later inspired D.W. Griffith to develop the "grammar of film."

So, in a very real sense, I consider *Deadly Resurrection* to be not only my first novel, but my first feature film.

CITRO: In terms of getting published, after such a string of non-fiction books, what difficulties did you find making the transition into fiction?

McCARTY: In terms of the work involved, I didn't find the transition all that difficult. In fact, I found writing the novel to be a lot easier. There was no need to interview anyone, spend days screening films, search for stills, research, write, check endless facts, and so on. I just sat there and let my imagination go.

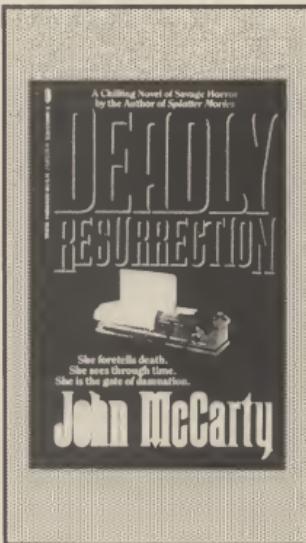
In terms of getting the book published, however, the transition was difficult because I was starting off at ground zero. Well, maybe not exactly at ground zero. While I had no background and therefore no credibility as a fiction writer, I *did* have publishing contacts and an agent who could present my case. Still, there was a prejudice: just because I could write nonfiction didn't mean I could write fiction. That may be true of some writers, but not me, I felt. I'd been around long enough that I could sell a nonfiction book on the basis of a proposal, but I wasn't established as a fiction writer. So I had to write a good chunk of the novel to show what I could do. And the book sold to the second house that saw it.

CITRO: In your heart of hearts, how do you think of yourself now, as a film historian or as a novelist?

McCARTY: In my heart of hearts, I think of myself as a film junkie who writes books about the cherished films and filmmakers from which he has learned -- and who writes and directs films in novel form.

CITRO: Tell me about the novel, *Deadly Resurrection*?

McCARTY: *Deadly Resurrection* was born in my mind about twenty years ago. I was living in California -- my aspiring writer-director period. A friend and I began working on an anthology idea to present to



John Newland, the producer-director of one of my favorite old TV shows, *One Step Beyond*.

The story I came up with was about a modern Pandora who releases a demon and then must fight like hell to send it back where it belongs. *Rosemary's Baby* and the genre cliche of "the damsel in distress" triggered the idea. In most genre fiction and films the heroine must fight to survive from the basis of ignorance. I wanted to reverse that cliche and see what a heroine would do who knows about the occult forces threatening her. The anthology proj-

ect came to nothing, but the idea stayed with me, and I eventually turned it into a novel. I went through four drafts before the book finally took on the shape and substance I always wanted it to.

CITRO: Now that you're a published novelist, how will you gauge your success?

McCARTY: The main way I'll gauge my success as a novelist is if I succeed in publishing others. I certainly proved to myself that I could write a novel -- and a good one, I truly believe. That was really all that was important to me. If others like it, and more important, appreciate it, would be a nice bonus. That and to make some money off it, of course.

CITRO: Yeah, of course. And since you brought it up, let's talk about money. Do you think you, or anyone, can support themselves writing books about movies?

McCARTY: If you have no overhead, no bills, no materialistic habits to feed, and can eat McDonald's every night, sure you can support yourself writing books about movies.

CITRO: What about the big bucks?

McCARTY: I suppose if you hit on a subject related to the movies -- a biography, for example -- for which you can get a larger advance because it has best-seller potential (something I have not done), you can make a good living at it. The other way is to produce several books each year, living off the combined smaller advances you get for each book.

CITRO: Do you stand a better chance of making big money by writing fiction?

McCARTY: Not really, because the same thing's true of fiction. Most authors, horror and otherwise, simply don't get huge advances. If they wish to write full-time, they must

turn out several books a year to survive. That's a real grind, though -- and I think, inevitably, the quality of what you write suffers if you have to produce so much. It's best to have a mate who works and hauls in a decent salary.

CITRO: Based on your extensive knowledge of novels and movies, why do you think horror is portrayed so very differently on the page and on the screen?

McCARTY: I don't think they are portrayed differently. Writers and filmmakers use the same basic tools -- restraint, subtlety, graphic horror -- and, depending on the climate of the times in terms of censorship, always have -- though horror literature was there first, of course.

The only exception to that rule I can think of is the splatterpunk movement of today, which actually takes its name and approach from the "splatter movie." Not all horror writers today are splatterpunks, though -- in fact, most aren't. So now that I think about it, I guess the approach is different because most horror films made these days are also splatter movies . . .

One discrepancy between the two media that has struck me as curious is this: throughout history, the most influential writers of horror literature -- Shelley, Poe, Stoker, Lovecraft, Bloch, King, et cetera -- have all been genre buffs, or, if the genre didn't exist at the time, supernatural buffs. Whereas in film, the reverse has usually been true: Lon Chaney, Fritz Lang, James Whale, Boris Karloff, Bela Lugosi, Val Lewton, Jacques Turnier, Peter Cushing, Christopher Lee, Terence Fisher -- none of them had a particular fascination with the subject, yet their contributions remain among the most lasting. Even today, if you look at the most influential horror films -- *The Exorcist*, *Alien* and so on -- they too were made by people who are not obsessed with the genre. Even David Cronenberg, whom I consider the best of today's

current generation of horror filmmakers, is not a genre buff to the extent that, say Stephen King is. Maybe to be a great horror filmmaker, you need some distancing from the subject, whereas in literature you need to be immersed. I wonder . . .

CITRO: Do you think you personally have made any contributions to the horror field? If so, what (however minor)?



McCARTY: To have defined and given a name to an aspect of the genre that has since become part of the language is certainly a contribution -- though I don't know how major or minor it is. There is also a certain amount of satisfaction in knowing that you have written at least one book, *Splatter Movies*, which, because it was the first to deal with the subject (and deals with it well, I believe) belongs with a handful of other non-fiction books in every serious horror fan's library.

CITRO: I agree. I've had my copy since it came out. Let's talk about your newest film book for a minute. In *The Modern Horror Film* (which I enjoyed very much), you say Hammer's *Curse of Frankenstein* is the first *modern* horror film. In what way is it "modern"? And why do you pick that film as an important turning point?

McCARTY: *Hammer's Curse of Frankenstein* took one of the genre's established mythic themes -- the Frankenstein legend -- and gave it a bold new look and twist. The result spurred the next great wave of screen horror since the Universal days of the thirties and forties. Though not as good as a film, I don't believe, as James Whale's version, it was just as much of a groundbreaker in that everything the horror film has become since, for good and ill, can be seen, if only embryonically, in that film.

CITRO: So, Mr. Splatter, what's next for you? What projects do you have in the works right now?

McCARTY: I've recently changed agents and am now in the "settling in" period with her.

CITRO: Hmmmm. That sounds murky. I hope it's a productive association . . .

McCARTY: So far. We have lots of new projects in mind, including two novels -- one of them an outright thriller with overtones of horror, and the other a more conventional supernatural tale, which, I hope, will not be conventional in the telling. Also on the drawing board is a Volume two of *The Official Splatter Movie Guide*, and several other movie-related books. One of them has a slightly different take on the kinds of films I have been writing about for years. I also hope to do a Volume two of *The Modern Horror Film* down the road. And I have an idea for another non-fiction subject that combines my two

primary interests -- movies and true crime.

CITRO: In the realms of horror fiction and film, can you name a few underrated authors, books, or movies that you wish more people would discover?

McCARTY: I must confess that I don't read a lot of horror fiction -- or, at least, I read it in spurts and not consistently.

CITRO: Why's that?

McCARTY: Well, I may be reading the wrong authors, but the reason, frankly, is that I find an awful lot of contemporary horror fiction to be somewhat adolescent. Not in terms of writing necessarily, but definitely in terms of plot or theme and characterization.

Perhaps this is the fault of publishers who believe horror fiction appeals most strongly to people with an adolescent mentality, I don't know. But horror writers of years past did not seem to suffer from this problem. Everybody from Poe on through to Guy Endore and Theodore Sturgeon dealt very seriously with adult themes and characters. An awful lot of what's being produced today seems to stem from a very childlike perspective: the boogeyman will get you, don't look under the bed, the monster in the closet, et cetera.

CITRO: Can you name some recent stuff you *have* enjoyed?

McCARTY: Some books I've recently read and enjoyed that don't suffer from this problem? Sure. Jeffrey Sackett's *Blood of the Impaler* is an absolutely terrific sequel/update of *Dracula*. There's Stephen King's *Misery*, Stuart Woods's *Under the Lake*, Thomas Harris's *Silence of the Lambs*, Richard Laymon's very grim but funny as hell *Resurrection Dreams*, and your own *The Unseen*, which is not really a horror novel, but more of a dark mystery.

CITRO: Which books or authors have influenced your fiction?

McCARTY: Guy Endore's *Werewolf of Paris* and Theodore Sturgeon's *Some Of Your Blood* greatly influenced my approach to what I think horror fiction should be -- and they continue to be excellent examples of the kind of horror fiction I like. There is great depth to both these books; they're not just superficial scarecrows. Colin Wilson has also been a strong influence, certainly thematically. And William March's *The Bad Seed* greatly influenced my novel *Deadly Resurrection*.

Otherwise, I would say the greatest influence on me as a fiction writer and as a writer *per se* have been filmmakers: at the head of which stands Ken Russell, whose work literally changed my life, certainly my outlook on things. I used to be a very pessimistic and cynical person -- albeit cheerfully so. Typically Irish, in other words. Exposure to Russell changed all that, though I'm far from a polly-

anna as *Deadly Resurrection* clearly shows. I'm now what you might call a mystic realist, which is typically Irish. As horrifying as my treatment of the subject matter in *Deadly Resurrection* may be (and hopefully is), the outlook of that book is not bleak. That's Russell's doing, no doubt about it.

CITRO: Of all your books, which is your favorite and why?

McCARTY: I don't have one favorite; I have three. The first is my book *Psychos* because I felt, and still do, that it was a very different kind of film book. It was a character study using film as case history examples. Doing it, I feel, helped me a lot when I turned to writing fiction. In that book, too, I coined a genre term: *psychofilm*, meaning "psychological film." I see such films as a genre as well, though neither the book nor the phrase took off like splatter movies.

My second favorite is my John Huston book, which will be re-released as a trade paperback this fall and will include two additional chapters, one about his latest film *The Dead*, and another about his final days. The book contains the best film criticism and analysis I've ever written.

And my third favorite is *Deadly Resurrection*. Why? Because in addition to being my first novel, it reflects *me* exactly -- stylistically, aesthetically and philosophically. You don't have to meet me to know me. All you have to do is read that book -- though unfortunately, you'll miss out on my wife's cooking. — CD



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THE MOLE

DAVID NIALL WILSON has sold fiction to such diverse markets as *Cavalier*, *Starshore*, *Nugget*, *Deathrealm*, *Thin Ice*, and *Dead of Night*. In addition to his writing talents, he is the editor of the Virginia-based publication, *The Tome*. "The Mole" marks Wilson's first appearance in *Cemetery Dance*.

The slimy water rose to his waist, then to the center of his chest as he sloshed forward through the moonlight. It was soothing, easing the fiery itch of mosquito bites and the paper-thin cuts of plants, leaving fever to grow in their place. A vine slapped across his face and he grunted, gritting his teeth against the fear that threatened his thoughts, tantalizing him with visions of panicked flight and almost certain, half-desired death. The fear was not strong enough, not quite. Gus wanted very much to live, to feel Sarah's smooth skin flow beneath him, warm and soft like the river, to drink a beer. He continued to move steadily ahead, blanking his mind as thoroughly as possible and concentrating on the shadowed, muddy banks. He would be there soon, and it would be easy to miss it in the dark. Especially with every nerve, every cell of his brain screaming, "No!" in deafening, discordant protest.

A long, sinuous form slid past him, running its silken length across his thigh, and he stopped, shuddering violently. His breath leapt wildly from tortured lungs, refusing to be replaced immediately, and forcing him to stand helplessly, recovering.

"Damn," he muttered, hearing the single, muffled word as though it were a thunderclap, echoing through the jungle, drawing them near. He did not repeat his curse, but moved on instead, still working to force his heartbeat back to a reasonable rate.

Then he was there. It yawned dark and ominous, beckoning like the throat of some huge, slumbering serpent. Chilled to a depth his conscious mind could barely comprehend, he stared, hypnotized.

The wind brushed through his hair, twining the stray ends like tiny snakes. His scalp tingled with fear, on thin, spidery feet, marched in a relentless tide down the length of his spine.

For a second, one short breath, he nearly broke. This was it, the moment of success or death, the test. It was always like this before going in. Nobody could understand who had not been there. The tunnel faced him, dark emptiness and damp terror. He faced it in return, battling the acceleration of his heartbeat and

praying monotonously to a god he no longer believed in, and who, in any case, had long since been bumped from his fear list. Action was the only answer, the only means of relief -- either to run or to enter. There were no other choices.

Checking his belt, with its water-proof pockets and sealed pouches, he grunted satisfaction and pulled his knife. Starting forward, he gripped the double-edged blade tightly between his teeth. The smooth, hard surface was difficult to grip. Despite the apparent ease of this portrayed in Tarzan movies, the art of holding the knife tightly and securely without slicing the jaw was a tenuous security at best. It freed his hands, which was necessary, but breathing was difficult enough in the tunnels without the aching jaw and the nervous sweat. If it hadn't been for the rats, he'd have been tempted to leave it sheathed. No way, though. Scars on his forearm and cheek reminded him of the rats every time he got near a mirror. He'd carry the knife. The hell with his mouth; it would heal.

Walls hugged him on both sides as he slid, belly flat in the muck, into silent, eerie darkness. There was about a foot of space above him, no more, packed mud, clay, and carefully placed stone -- drainage from the camp a quarter of a mile away. He blanked his mind, concentrating on the forward motion, sliding, pulling with his hands and pushing carefully with his feet, never slowing and, God forbid he should stop. He'd tried once to rest in a tunnel. The reality of the thousands of pounds of earth spreading around him had clutched at his mind with such intensity that he'd panicked, his mind reeling in frantic, dizzying haste to claw free, to escape. His breath had seemed to evaporate from his lungs, the dark air to solidify, becoming like mud in his throat. Only a headlong forward rush had saved him, thrown him a lifeline of dimly recalled sanity to draw him onward. The last thing one wanted in the tunnels was to think. There was only movement, slow breath, and the constant watch for rats; all else ceased to exist. The two ends of the tunnel connected to reality, but the tunnel was dislocated from it, a warp in the fabric of the world. Rational thought there was as counter to the continuation of life as it was necessary outside. It seemed he crawled for years, and there was no 'light at the end of the tunnel,' as Sarah was so fond of striving toward, only more blackness.

A gently blowing breeze ushered him from the shadow and into reality, illuminated him with the silver-bright face of the moon, impossibly bright after the light-



less void that lay behind him. No rats, no more snakes. He would have grinned, but it would have cost him the sides of his mouth. The knife had inched its way deeper between his clenched teeth, slicing his tongue. Ahead, in the moonlight, lay the mission -- his mission -- and then the return. It would be quicker going back. The tunnel was on an incline toward the river. This facilitated the dumping of waste water and refuse. On the way down, he would nearly slide. Momentarily he paused, wondering why there was no screen, nothing to block his exit from the tunnel. Shrugging, he moved on.

There would be time for speculation later, if he still cared; now was death. If he wasn't careful, quiet as breath and quick as a sliding cloud of shadow, it would be his own death. He shifted the knife from his mouth to his right hand, spitting softly to clear the clotting blood, and rose slowly, straightening cramped limbs and rubbing joints to limber them. He was, for the moment, concealed from view by large, drooping ferns. They shifted slightly, rustling in the grip of the night air. As his eyes and senses reoriented to the light, he moved cautiously toward the edge of the cleared camp area, darting his eyes about as though each shadow held death. It might.

Parting the heavy foliage, he could see, perhaps a hundred yards distant, the nearest of the hut-like structures that served as barracks for the enemy. It was ominously quiet, and he searched the area quickly and meticulously for the guards. Their presence was not in question, but with luck, and he had always been lucky, their attention would be focused outward -- he was already inside. Surprise was his strongest ally, it had watched his back and kept him alive longer than any partner could have hoped to. "The Mole" -- for that was how they called him, watching him with loathing, fear, and a morbid curiosity from behind guarded eyes -- worked alone. It was his way.

There were three of them on this side of the camp. One moved slowly along the perimeter, eyes scanning the surrounding jungle. The other two were perched midway up trees to the east and south, undoubtedly mirrored by others on the north and west sides. Clasping the small crucifix he always wore about his throat, firmly attached to his dog-tags, he moved into the open, staying low and covering ground rapidly. The roving guard was nearly out of sight, not yet doubling back, and he slipped easily into the shadowed growth along the building's nearest wall. He had not been seen.

The door was unlatched. Nothing disturbed the silence but the monotonous buzzing of insects and steady breathing from the shadows within. He moved without pause for thought; that was his only option. Inside lay death, sleeping death. Only quick, certain movements and precise actions would insure that it did not waken to claim him.

Fear was the reasoning behind his existence. Slip in, destroy, slip out, sliding through tunnels, impassable

pits, escaping without a trace. Terror followed in his wake. It was demoralizing, the kind of thing to take the edge off an enemy blade and tip the scales in favor of the intruders, his comrades. Enough to help even up a battle they didn't properly understand. They needed him, though he saw in their eyes a fear and loathing nearly equal of those he stalked. They could not, would not enter his world of shadow and death, could not comprehend one who could. They would have chained him, locked him away to ease their own minds, but for their fear, and for their need. Without the advantage he gave, real-estate would become available back home, widows would grieve. They left him to his solitude. He did what he could to maintain sanity within it. It was a partnership of blood, deep as life, certain as death. He was their secret weapon. Even their superiors didn't really know. They would never understand.

He slipped through shadows, avoiding obstacles and treading the feather-light tread of utter concentration. All else was shut out -- he existed only to kill, and the object of his existence called to him with deep, even breath. This was a different barracks from those he was used to -- more room, fewer bunks. He guessed it to be some kind of officer's quarters. All the better, men without leaders would win few battles. He moved to the first door and entered without pause, moving to the side of the bunk within. Something was wrong, something he could not place. The breathing remained steady -- steady, but short. It was wrong.

He forced the ice from his veins, moved while he could still get his hands to cooperate. Nothing was wrong, it was his nerve that was slipping, his control. He snatched at the long black hair beneath his gaze and reached for his knife. Lightning reflexes slashed, the blade left a glittering trail of echoed light to snatch hypnotically at his eyes. Screams erupted, surrounding him with sound, shocking him to immobility.

How can he scream? His mind couldn't accept it. How can he scream with no throat?

Hands clutched at him from behind. Light suffused the room, incandescent brilliance that stole his sight. The screams went on, the head in his grasp -- too small, he suddenly noticed -- shook violently from side to side. *Not possible! No screams, no shaking without a throat . . . the knife, he . . .*

Blackness sprouted from the point of impact on the back of his head, staggering him. Releasing the hair, he spun, stumbled toward the door. Hands reached for him again, eyes hated him and promised death. *The clothes were wrong -- the eyes were wrong.* Backing, he managed to reach the door, crashing around it into the corridor and nearly falling out the door into darkness. Curses -- not Vietnamese -- wrong!

The tunnel was close. He dove headlong for the weeds and tumbled down the muddy embankment. Behind him, cursing again, more light, sirens? *Wrong! Wrong!*

Darkness slid about him again as he clawed frantically forward into the tunnel. Only escape was left. Don't think, never think in the tunnels, only move. A little at a time, and Damn! He'd forgotten to put the knife in his teeth! His thoughts filled with the feral, yellow-eyed memory of rats, and his breathing became labored, gasping. Damn! It was all wrong!

**

" . . . the facts of this bizarre attack are not clear, as yet, though police claim to have a lead on one Gus, "The Mole" Gronden, recently reported missing from the Windhaven Hospital for the Mentally Ill . . . "

- *New York Times*

**

"He sat quietly every day he was here, never spoke. Came straight to us from the war. I never thought he was dangerous . . . "

- Tom McCord, Director, Windhaven

**

"Started waving my Sally, my little girl, around like a rag-doll, all dressed up in a hospital gown and acting crazy. Looked like he thought he had a knife, and I'd swear he was sayin' somethin' that sounded like 'wrong.'"

- *San Valencez Chronicle*

**

"A thorough search is being conducted of the city drains, he can't stay out of sight forever. Until then, he should be considered possibly armed and definitely dangerous. I don't know where they get these damned psychos, but I know where we'll put him."

- Inspector Tommy Doyle, San Valencez P.D.

**

Below the city, trailing after a thin web of sanity long since beyond the limits of those above, Gus slouched onward. Already his mind was fogging. All he knew was that he must be almost there. He had to be careful, or he would miss it. He had to clear his mind. Ahead, the tunnel loomed.

- CD

paul sammon's



ROUGH CUTS

Welcome to the premiere installment of *Rough Cuts*, an ongoing effort whose motto is:

"Not your ordinary film column."

First, though, some facts.

Any information needed to establish Paul M. Sammon's credentials/credibility can be found scattered throughout this article. For now, suffice it to say I'm a practicing filmmaker and established writer; my credits include co-producing a weekly television program, being involved in such disparate films as *Platoon*, *Return of the Living Dead*, and *Blue Velvet*, publishing many film criticism/history pieces in such magazines as *Omni* and *The American Cinematographer*, writing/editing/producing/directing short films and documentaries, and editing books like the forthcoming St. Martin's anthology *Splatterpunks: Extreme Horror*.

So rest assured -- my career has embraced both word and image, film and fiction. However, and much more importantly, I'd like to think my knowledge and appreciation of all the twisted shapes horror can assume, in print and celluloid, is fairly

encyclopedic.

In other words, trust me.
OK?
Onwards.

**

The Industry

Beginning next column I'll concern myself with that predictable staple of movie criticism, the film and video review. For now, let's just say that of the major summer 1990 film releases I've seen thus far, I can毫不犹豫地 recommend *Wild At Heart*, *Darkman*, *Ghost*, *Total Recall*, and *Gremlins II*. Sure, they all have their problems; on the other hand, they're also certainly worth a rental when they hit your video store.

So, let's get to our real topic.

Every now and then *Rough Cuts* will filter the film industry through the insider's viewpoint (that is, my own), with behind-the-scenes information on the nuts-and-bolts process of filmmaking. This approach won't be a public relations handout, won't be a cutesy-poo collection of sappy star stories. It will occasionally focus on what *actually transpired* during the production of certain films

(the ones I've worked on or have unusual knowledge of, anyway).

As I'm convinced there's an intelligent audience curious to know what truly goes on during the overall filmmaking process (don't disappoint me now), and since I've *been there*, in many different capacities, I feel a certain... obligation towards illuminating those nebulous areas which Siskel and Ebert, Pauline Kael, Ed Naha, Frank Robinson or even Joe Bob Briggs commonly avoid.

It all boils down to two statements:

My conviction is that the mine of filmmaking can never be totally tapped out (there's simply too many levels).

My hope is that, by working new veins of interest, you'll be rewarded with rare gems whose true value lies in their cold, sparkling hearts; just hold one of those beauties up to the light for a fresh perspective on what making movies is *really* all about.

Ready to learn?
Good.

Then let's explore how a lateral or even regressive career move can sometimes be good for you.

The preceding statement will, of course, strike some as indicative of career suicide. Especially within the film business, which is routinely portrayed as hypercompetitive, cutthroat and ruthlessly aggressive (there's an old joke that goes, "Who's a Hollywood friend? Someone who stabs you in the front.") And yes, there's a large slab of truth within that perception; sooner or later, film crews routinely get around to swapping their personal horror stories. Believe me, everyone has them.

On the other hand, there's always that exception to the rule.

Case in point? My recent stint as Unit Publicist on *RoboCop 2*.

Now, if there were any two questions I've been repeatedly asked about my *Robo 2* experience, they'd have to be these:

- 1) *How did you get your job?*
- 2) *Why did you do publicity?*

Well, questions #1 and #2 can almost be answered simultaneously.

But first, we have to backtrack, so you'll have a clearer understanding of both my actual position within the film and television industry, and how I got there.

In 1986, *RoboCop*'s producer Jon Davison (who also produced the popular *Airplane!* and the not-so-popular *White Dog*) offered me the job of unit publicist on *RoboCop 1*.

Know what?

I turned him down.

Not that I didn't like the project, you understand. In fact, I'd read *Robo*'s script and thought it was terrific.

Nope; the reason I refused Davison's offer was because I had problems with the job itself.

You see, unit publicists are historically among the lowest rungs on the filmmaking ladder. In fact, publicists are barely one step above Craft Services (the people who make sure those coffees and doughnuts are

on the set *everyday*). What's more, crew members usually look down on publicists as a nuisance, since they're not really involved in *making* a film. Publicists are more likely to be perceived as either glorified social directors (stressed out over whether some visiting journalist is being properly winded and dined) or as overpaid security blankets (concerned with hand-holding nervous film talents before, during and after an interview).

So Jon made his offer. I thought, *Who needs the aggravation?*

Besides, another reason for turning down Davison was that I was juggling other work on five or six films at the DeLaurentiis Entertainment Group (including *Manhunter* and *Evil Dead II*). These duties primarily entailed specialized national marketing work, a niche I'd carved out for myself and one in which I was granted an extraordinary amount of studio (read corporate) freedom.

So practically and personally speaking, I just couldn't see where *Robo 1* fit into my agenda.

(Incidentally, are you picking up on the general drift here, the one regarding the answer to Question #1? To work in the film business you must be *already working in the film business*; at least, in one form or another. Yup, it's that old *Catch 22* situation, although there are ways around this bind.)

(But I digress.)

Anyway, months passed. And things changed. Not for the better. Because DEG was suddenly, and spectacularly, shaking itself apart (I wonder if producing big-budget bombs like *King Kong Lives* and *Tai-Pan* had anything to do with it?) In any event, by Christmas of 1987, DEG was basically kaput.

Yet *RoboCop 1*, an in-studio project funded by Orion Pictures, was rolling right along. In fact, it was just nearing the end of principal photography.

And then Jon Davison called again.

The *RoboCop* publicist's job

had already been filled, of course. But Jon had other ideas on how we could work together.

Was I interested?

You betcha!

I then spent the next eight months pretty much tied to a single film. Even so, there was a wonderful diversity to my involvement. Among other accomplishments, I'd eventually produce/edit/direct a seven-minute *RoboCop* documentary for international television, write half an issue of *Cinefex* magazine on *Robo 1*'s special effects, publicize the film at various horror/sf/comic book conventions, shoot a video on the film's effects, and work with the likes of *Starlog* and *Cinefantastique* to make sure articles concerning *Robo 1* found their way into those publications (this procedure is called *planting*, by the way). And no modern film is ever covered in the press or television simply because that media just happens to love a particular film. There's a whole subterranean support structure out there making sure Arnold Schwarzenegger gets on *Entertainment Tonight*).

Now, shouldn't it be obvious from the above that most of the services I provided on *RoboCop* were promotional ones? The more nimble-minded amongst you should be asking, *I thought he said he didn't want to be a publicist?*

I didn't.

Here's another reason.

To begin, let's be blunt; publicity is basically hype, and hoopla, and -- bottom line -- parasitism. I'm well aware of this, and there have been times -- such as when I was promoting low-foreheaded films like *World Gone Wild* or *Return of the Living Dead II* -- that that realization made me pretty damn miserable.

But. It's one thing to simultaneously work on a number of different films for a single studio, carefully crafting months-in-the-making campaigns that blanket the nation (which was what I was essentially doing at DEG), and quite another to tie yourself down to one film, to be forever

known as that film's *publicist*.

Besides, even in my darkest hours of promotional self-doubt, I could cheer myself up with the knowledge that I was still writing. Still making documentaries. Still running my own company (Awesome Productions, Inc.). And still trying to break through as a filmmaker.

So despite all the *Robo 1* promotions I engineered, I couldn't really pigeonhole myself as a *publicist*. Additionally, *RoboCop* in itself was such a damn fine film that I was grateful to have been involved with it on *any* level (whereas *Robo 2* was -- let's face it -- a severe disappointment).

Fast-forward three years, to January 1989.

Deja vu! It's Jon Davison on the phone again, this time wanting to know if I'm interested in being Unit Publicist for *RoboCop 2*!

Once again, I turn him down. This time, for a better reason. You see, in the interim between *Robo's 1 & 2*, my writing/producing/directing career had finally taken off. To be honest, it hasn't "broken through," but at least by 1989 I'd shot commercials, industrial and promo films.

Much more importantly, by now I'd also had a year's experience co-producing a weekly television show based in Tokyo; one called *Hello! Movies* (we're still running, I'm happy to say; our format is something like a Japanese version of *Entertainment Tonight*).

So with all of these achievements swimming in my head, I asked Jon: "What the heck do I need to take a career step down for?"

To which Davison replied: "So what? Lawrence Kasdin directed *Body Heat* and then turned around and helped write the screenplay for *Return of the Jedi!* You think Kasdan looked on that as a backstep?"

I said, "Ask me to write *RoboCop 2*."

"Can't," Jon came back. "I've got a guy named Frank Miller. But here's what I *will* ask."

Now, Jon Davison is shrewd. And persistent. He knew I'd just locked up the final details for *Hello! Movies'* upcoming season, knew I'd been planning to take a long vacation, knew I'd still be able to conduct my Japanese business through the *Robo 2* production offices (which I ultimately did, via telephone, late most every night, during the four months the majority of *RoboCop 2* was being filmed in Houston, Texas).

Jon then offered lots more money than the standard *publicist* wages (which I didn't really need). He also threw in the promise that I could involve myself in other *RoboCop 2* production areas, ones non-publicity related.

That one I listened to. Since Texas is a right-to-work state (which means they have no film unions), *RoboCop 2* wouldn't be operating under strict guild guidelines. This is turn indicated that I perhaps would, indeed, have an opportunity to spill over into departments usually closed off because of union regulations (incidentally, just about everything you've heard about film unions is true. You'd better not pick up, much less plug in, an electrical cord on a union shoot. Not unless you're an electrician, or willing to face down a clutch of irate Teamsters).

Anyway, I was still hesitant. After all, I was now a *producer* (though hardly a major-league one).

Jon said something strange: "Okay, maybe in your mind it's a step down. You're probably right. But what have you got to loose? I still think you can help the film. You've got some time off, so think of it as a paid vacation, if you have to. Besides, it'll be good for you."

Puzzled, I asked Jon what he meant.

No reply, except a query as to whether I was in or out.

Well . . . it was another *RoboCop*, right? Not a bad credit in the old resume. And I'd had a great time on the first film. Then there was the money. Not to mention the fact that my wife Sherri would also be

working on *Robo 2* as the Second Unit Assistant Production Coordinator.

What the hell?

I enlisted.

And you know what?

Davison was right.

One unexpected bonus resulting from my stint as *Robo 2*'s Unit Publicist was rather spiritual. You see, very few *RoboCop 2* crew members (actually, only Jon and Sherri) knew of my day job as a producer. To the rank and file I was just Publicist Paul, and treated accordingly. To be fair, though, while it was rather sobering to be perceived as a lower echelon grunt (and to suffer the constant frustration of not being in charge), most of the *Robo 2* crew were about as professional, hard-working, and friendly a group of people you'd ever want to meet.

In any event, the first lesson my *Robo 2* publicist stint taught me was that, yes, a little humility is good for the soul.

The second lesson was much more comprehensive, and much more rewarding.

You see, filmmaking is bound by a powerful caste system. Most of it is subtle, but it's there. The camera crew parties with the camera crew, effects people cling to people from effects, and most actors hang out with themselves. Overall, you just don't see many grips being invited to dinner with the director.

Now I'd always known this. What I didn't fully appreciate (until I found myself in the position) was how loosely unit publicists are shackled to the system.

Let me explain part of the job. Publicists really only work with one other person during a shoot; this is the unit's still photographer, for reasons that should be obvious. And depending on who's cutting their checks, publicists are really only answerable to the studio or the producer (unless they fuck up and piss off a department head, star, or director. Then it's *Sayonara, Robo Flop*).

So one upside to unit work is

the general condition of only being accountable to a couple of people. But the far greater benefit accorded the usually scorned position of unit publicist lies in its enormous flexibility... not to mention an unparalleled opportunity to *learn*. Publicists move around freely, top to bottom, side to side, mingling with such above-the-line personnel as the stars and directors as well as the cinematographers, editors, and sound mixers.

It's all up to you.

In a very real sense, then, being a unit publicist offers incredible potential for upward mobility. Maybe that's why Nicholas Meyer, who was the unit publicist on *Love Story*, eventually wound up directing movies like *The Day After* and *Star Trek II: The Wrath of Khan*. And maybe that's why so many producers once were unit publicists.

In any event, once I was working on *Robo 2* and realized I had this particular football in my hands, I ran with it. Although *RoboCop 2* obviously wasn't my first barbecue (I've been involved with the film industry since the late '70s), no other single production has been so good to me.

For instance:

Where else could I learn so many blocking and relaxation techniques, all excellent methods used to gain an actor's trust?

Where else could I discuss the daily practicalities of 70mm special effects plate photography with Rick Fichter, one of the best effects cameramen in the business?

Where else could I sit by the side of Jon Davison and watch him grapple (brilliantly, I might add) with the headaches of relentless studio pressure, or negotiate with those local businesses which were trying to gouge the production company, or confront an illness which threatened to shut us all down during the first week of principal photography?

Only on *RoboCop 2*.

Don't misunderstand -- I may have been mobile, but I was still doing the job they hired me for. Not badly, if I do say so myself.

The thing is, I ended up doing so much *more*.

Like setting up and supervising an on-site computer graphics department (for which I received the credit of Computer Graphics Supervisor). Or flying out with a video crew to Bushwick, Brooklyn, where I produced and directed a short film for the Drug Enforcement Agency (with I as an anti-drug spokesman). Or doing a genuine spot of on-set direction, with what I laughingly called my "Third Unit" (I and my little crew shot closeups of video monitors. It may not be a big deal to you, but I still got to say "Cut!" and "Action!" A lot. And on the set of a major film, too).

I even got to act. Sort of. If you look closely, I appear as an extra in two different scenes; once as a Vice cop in the "Robo-Chamber," where *RoboCop's* been reduced to a dangling torso, and once as a scowling serial killer on a computer screen.

So while it may have taken awhile, I finally understood what Jon Davison meant when he said this would be good for me. Ultimately, I worked on *RoboCop 2* for about 14 months (April '89 to June '90), and throughout I was in the enviable position of being privy to the billions of details which make up a major motion picture; everything from watching the script evolve in pre-production to listening to a full 96-piece orchestra lay down *Robo 2's* score during post-production.

My one and only job as unit publicist didn't turn out so badly after all, did it?

Now, I'll probably never do publicity again. I'm back in the producer's seat; there's even a chance I'll be directing my own feature film (maybe as early as 1991).

On the other hand, I'll always cherish the education I received on *RoboCop 2*.

Even if I had to risk a lateral career move.

-- CD

A CRY OF SHADOWS



ED GORMAN

"(Dwyer's) methodical investigation and the novel's believable characters and situations yield a satisfying tale."

—Publishers Weekly

"I didn't think anyone could top his *The Autumn Dead*, but Gorman came back and did it himself. *A Cry of Shadows* will touch you as deeply as anything you'll read this year."

—F. Paul Wilson

"*A Cry of Shadows* is a brave, sad novel that will both move and shock readers. In a genre awash with trendy Yuppie private eyes, Jack Dwyer is a convincing man of the people."

—Max Allan Collins

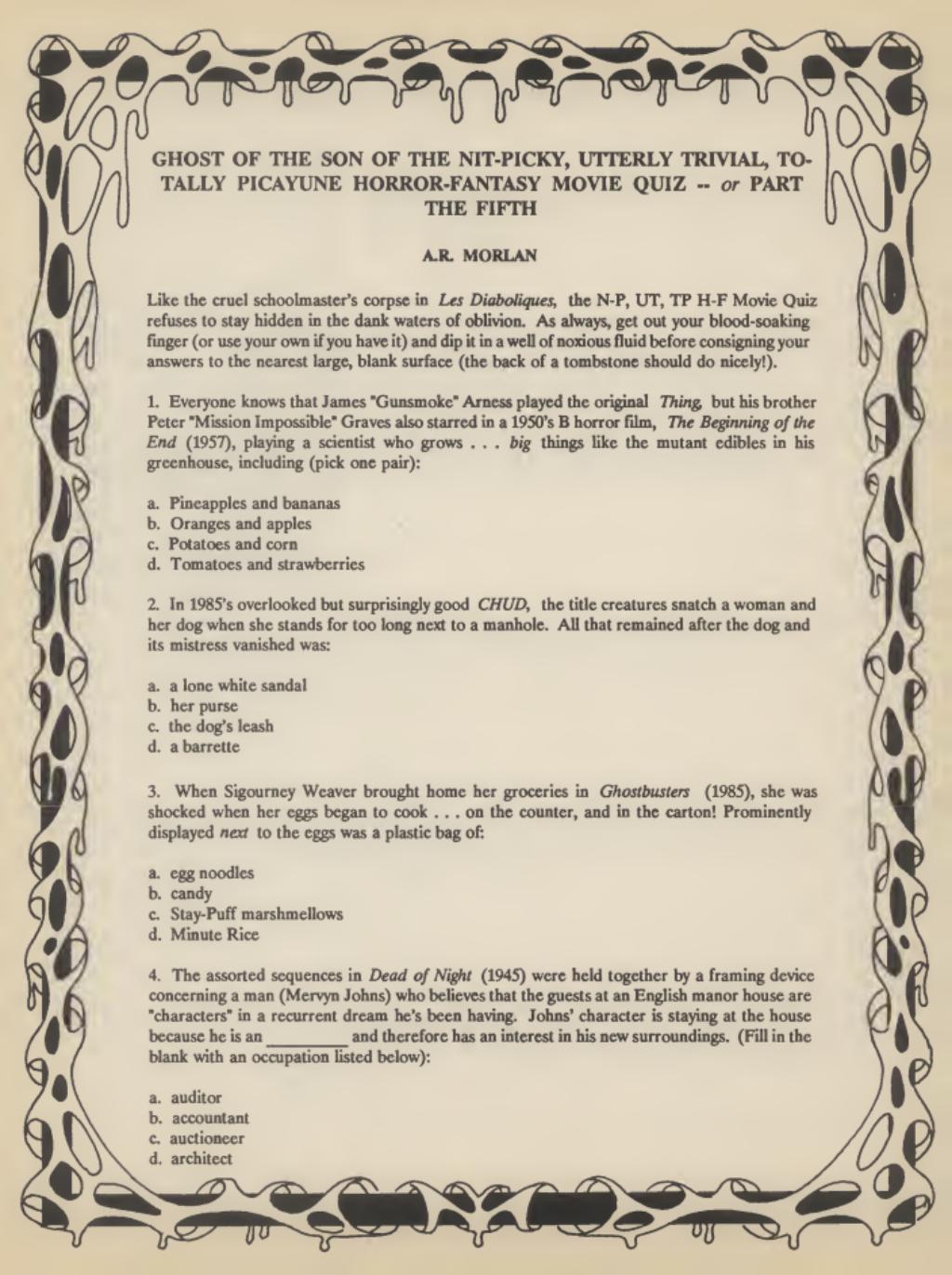
"With *A Cry of Shadows*, Gorman moves to the top of the list. Dwyer is an original character, and Gorman is an original writer."

—Joe R. Lansdale

"What sets Gorman apart is his insight into character and the sense of honor and justice so integral to the development of his plots. With *A Cry of Shadows*, Gorman has come into his own."

—Charles de Lint

ST. MARTIN'S, \$14.95



GHOST OF THE SON OF THE NIT-PICKY, UTTERLY TRIVIAL, TO-TALLY PICAYUNE HORROR-FANTASY MOVIE QUIZ -- or PART THE FIFTH

A.R. MORLAN

Like the cruel schoolmaster's corpse in *Les Diaboliques*, the N-P, UT, TP H-F Movie Quiz refuses to stay hidden in the dank waters of oblivion. As always, get out your blood-soaking finger (or use your own if you have it) and dip it in a well of noxious fluid before consigning your answers to the nearest large, blank surface (the back of a tombstone should do nicely!).

1. Everyone knows that James "Gunsmoke" Arness played the original *Thing*, but his brother Peter "Mission Impossible" Graves also starred in a 1950's B horror film, *The Beginning of the End* (1957), playing a scientist who grows . . . big things like the mutant edibles in his greenhouse, including (pick one pair):

- a. Pineapples and bananas
- b. Oranges and apples
- c. Potatoes and corn
- d. Tomatoes and strawberries

2. In 1985's overlooked but surprisingly good *CHUD*, the title creatures snatch a woman and her dog when she stands for too long next to a manhole. All that remained after the dog and its mistress vanished was:

- a. a lone white sandal
- b. her purse
- c. the dog's leash
- d. a barrette

3. When Sigourney Weaver brought home her groceries in *Ghostbusters* (1985), she was shocked when her eggs began to cook . . . on the counter, and in the carton! Prominently displayed next to the eggs was a plastic bag of:

- a. egg noodles
- b. candy
- c. Stay-Puff marshmallows
- d. Minute Rice

4. The assorted sequences in *Dead of Night* (1945) were held together by a framing device concerning a man (Mervyn Johns) who believes that the guests at an English manor house are "characters" in a recurrent dream he's been having. Johns' character is staying at the house because he is an _____ and therefore has an interest in his new surroundings. (Fill in the blank with an occupation listed below):

- a. auditor
- b. accountant
- c. auctioneer
- d. architect

5. What TV drama 'hunk' made his film debut in the title role of *The Possession of Joel Delaney*?

- a. Tom Selleck
- b. Perry King
- c. Joe Penny
- d. Bruce Willis

6. In the underrated 1946 historical horror film *Bedlam* (starring Boris Karloff), an inmate of Karloff's 18th century asylum dies hideously while portraying "Reason" in a play put on for the amusement of visiting noble guests at the madhouse. How did this unfortunate meet his maker? (HINT: someone was killed in an identical manner in a 1960's non-horror thriller):

- a. he was painted gold
- b. he drowned in a wine-vat
- c. he was cut by a tossed knife
- d. his costume caught fire

7. Long before the rest of *The Birds* went berserk, socialite Melanie Daniels ('Tippi' Hedron as Hitchcock dubbed her) wants a certain type of bird as a gift for her aunt; what sort of bird had she ordered at the San Francisco pet store?

- a. a parakeet
- b. a mynah bird
- c. a parrot
- d. a pair of doves

8. Here's a toughie -- during the final installment of a recent horror "series" of films, scenes from the *first* film in the *same* series were shown on a television set during a scene in the *last* entry in the series. Confused? -- scan the titles of the horror "series" listed below while you puzzle it out, then choose the correct set of films:

- a. the *Jaws* saga
- b. *Friday the 13th* (I, II, III, IV . . .)
- c. the *Halloween* "trilogy"
- d. the *Omen* cycle

9. There were a number of "specialty" and "odd" zombies roaming the mall in *Dawn of the Dead* (1979), but one of them shambled around all through the film, and was present on the roof during the final minutes of the movie. Identify this tenacious undead:

- a. the Hare Krishna
- b. the "helicopter" man
- c. the really obese guy with no shirt
- d. the nurse

10. Telepath Gillian (Amy Irving) had a strange "talent" in *The Fury* (1978); she could make people:

- a. choke
- b. freeze
- c. break out in boils
- d. bleed



LORI PERKINS

DREADFUL PLEASURES

Four Past Midnight by Stephen King, Viking, 763 pp.

He's back!

I'll be honest with you. After his two year horror-writing hiatus followed by *The Dark Half*, I wasn't sure he had it in him anymore. I mean, *The Dark Half* just didn't do it for me. It had its moments, but it didn't keep me turning the pages the way I wanted it to.

But *Four Past Midnight* is vintage King -- the kind of King that has me saying "just let me finish this chapter" to my husband when he's trying to lure me into bed. There are four large novellas (each about 200 pages) in this book, two of which kept me reading way past bedtime.

I was hooked into "The Langoliers" (the first tale) as soon as the little blind girl woke up on an airplane where most of the passengers had disappeared leaving their synthetic body parts behind (pacemakers, hearing aids, metal pins, etc.). A handful of passengers survive (an eclectic group that includes a commercial pilot, mystery writer, wilting spinster, British intelligence officer, teenage violinist, young substance abuser, sleeping drunk and a crazy bond salesman, plus the aforemen-

tioned blind girl) only to learn that they have slept through a journey into a hole in space which lets them out in the immediate past.

"The Langoliers" is not your everyday time travel story and this is not your average immediate past. It's the set for yesterday's occurrences, and it's fading fast. There are no people here -- they've gone on to the

I'll be honest with you.
After his two-year horror-writing hiatus, followed by
The Dark Half, I wasn't sure he had it in him anymore . . .

present -- and no people by-products like noise. Food has lost its taste, perfume its odor, matches their ability to ignite. The past just fades away until the Langoliers come to clean it up like huge pac-men eating their way through time, leaving strips of nothing in their wake.

Needless to say, the crew of Flight 29 hears the ticking clock loud and clear and must figure out a way to get back to the future fast. On the

way, some members die, others fall in love and one sleeps through the whole thing.

"The Library Police" (the third tale) is a story that captures that universal youthful fear of the consequences of overdue books and the adult suspicion of anyone who has mastered the dewey decimal system.

Sam Peebles, a middle-aged insurance salesman, borrows two books from the local library to help him with a speech before the Rotary Club. The speech goes so well that his business booms, and he forgets to return the two books. That's when he starts getting phone calls from the old lady librarian warning him that he will be visited by the Library Police if he doesn't bring the books back.

But the books are gone, thrown out with the trash by Dirty Dave, the local rummy, who picks up the recyclables on Thursdays. Sam goes to the library to pay the price of the books and finds that it's a different library and the librarian who loaned him the books is no longer there. As a matter of fact, she killed herself and two children in the library thirty years ago.

Dirty Dave tells Sam the story of his relationship with the shape-

shifting vampire who once worked as the librarian, feeding off the fear of children. She's chosen Sam because of his horrible memories of a childhood visit from another Library Policeman when he paid his fine in blood.

It might be that this novella grabbed me so strongly because I am married to a man who never met a library book he didn't like enough to add it to his personal book collection. I always wished a visit from the Li-

brary Police on him, but I take it back now.

The other two novellas in the book are good King. "The Sun Dog" is the story of a Polaroid Sun camera that only takes pictures of a dog from another dimension who gets a little closer with each advancing shot until he is ready to burst into the present with open fangs.

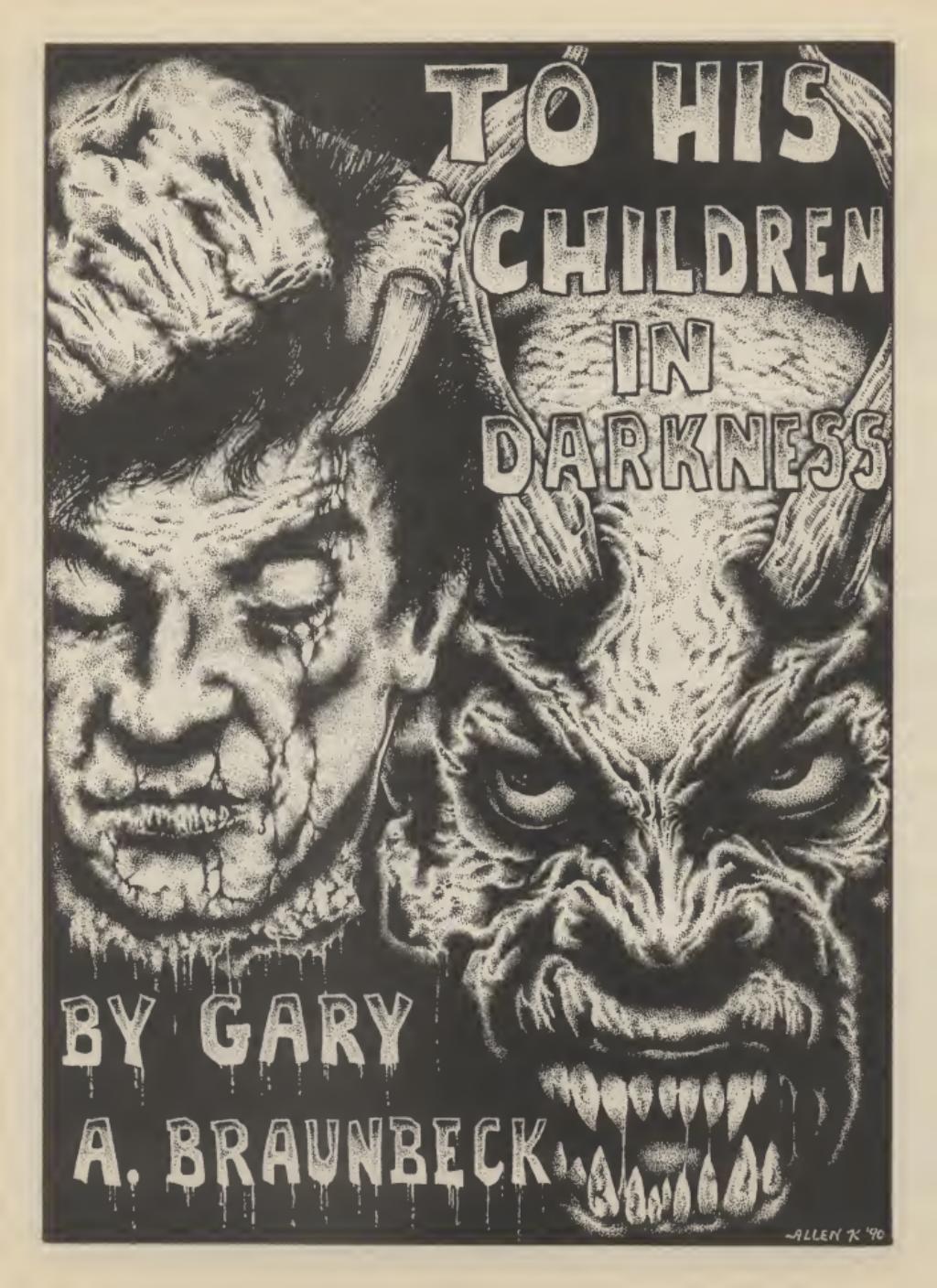
"Secret Window, Secret Garden" is *Misery* meets *The Dark Half*. Morton Rainey, the writer in this

novella, is visited by a figment of his imagination who insists that Rainey plagiarized one of his stories. Like George Stark, he's come for another story. But the writer has a dark festering tale of his own.

Four Past Midnight reminds you, in case you've forgotten "The Mist" or *Different Seasons*, that King is a master of the novella, as well as the well-told story.

-- CD





TO HIS
CHILDREN
IN
DARKNESS

BY GARY
A. BRAUNBECK

TO HIS CHILDREN IN DARKNESS

GARY A. BRAUNBECK makes his first appearance in *Cemetery Dance* with this chilling novella — a mythological tale of terror. Other Braunbeck stories of note have appeared in *Night Cry*, *Phantoms*, *Scare Care*, *Eldritch Tales*, *The Horror Show*, and *Masques III*. Ellen Datlow chose his powerful short story, "Family Matters" from *Not One Of Us* for her prestigious annual *The Year's Best Fantasy & Horror*.

"O then, why go through again
The Fatigue of re-making the fabulous shell
Of an ideal world, upon ancient runes? . . .
(Distant voices from the sea)
Ola-ch, Ola-oh! Let us destroy, destroy!"

-- F.T. Marinetti
"Against The Hope of Reconstruction"

one

The rains came very hard to Cedar Hill that fall and brought with them screams. A few were heard, many were not.

Some were human.

The first child, an eight-year-old boy, was found half buried in a ditch along Route 33, his stomach and groin ripped apart, his testicles severed. The county coroner, after his nausea ebbed ("I hoped to God I'd seen the last of this," he said to the sheriff), made the morbid speculation that -- judging from the way the child's intestines had been pulled outward -- the boy had been killed by an upward swing of something sharp and curved. Like a sickle.

Every person on the scene had nightmares about it later.

The storms raged with an occasional lull but never left, spreading small disasters -- people bleeding from wrecks caused by the downpours, deserted barns split apart and set afire by lightning, mudslides that destroyed

backroads, and homes damaged by the overpowering winds.

The storms raged . . . the second boy was found.

The storms lulled . . . the third boy was found.

Cedar Hill began looking over its shoulder after sunset; it kept a loaded shotgun in its living room; it kept its children in at night, children who would hide under the covers, fearfully peeking past the edge of the blankets expecting to see a howling monster leap from the space between the flash of lightning and explosion of thunder. The slap of footsteps on wet pavement became the sound of flesh torn from screaming children;

The silence which followed seemed to breathe;

The storm clouds multiplied like cancer cells;

And the rains came very hard to Cedar Hill, Ohio that fall.

two

The road shimmered and blurred as if seen through tears. Cletus Johnson squinted as the wipers whipped heavy streams of water across the windshield. He shook his head and blinked. Four years and it was happening again. Three boys this time. His hands were shaking. He was starting to see double. He took a deep breath to steady himself, thinking, *It could be a mistake*. But he hoped not. He slowed the car, rounded a curve, and glanced down at the thick file on the seat next to him.

Photographs, coroner's reports, newspaper articles, sworn statements. He spat out a derisive laugh, then fumbled a cigarette into his mouth. His hands no longer shook. He pressed down on the accelerator, ran a red light, and cast another quick glance at the file.

It contained documentation of a monster's killing spree, that much was easy to discern, but hidden in every shred of evidence were echoes of Cletus's greatest failure in life, one that had haunted him for nearly four years. He'd never found the killer, even with the small army of outside help the governor had called in.

That failure had cost him everything -- the election, his wife, his happiness, and a good portion of his self-respect.

The rain eased as he turned onto Cedar Hill's main

street and drove toward the sheriff's office. He remembered the nightmares he'd had about the two little boys. Thought about the drinking that he'd hoped would make them go away. Recalled in vivid detail the night Esther had packed up her things and walked out of the house.

"The only thing you got left inside you, Cletus, is blame. Blame for yourself. I've tried to make it better but you don't want to forgive yourself. So don't. I hope you and your blame will be very happy."

He parked the car in front of the station, picked up the file, and climbed out. After four years the place felt no different to him than when he'd been sheriff.

Joe McGuire was waiting for him outside, as promised.

"Cletus," he said, smiling. Cletus couldn't help but smile in return. Joe cut a dashing figure with that smile, a feature that had helped him to win the election. Cletus was glad that Joe had been the man to step in; he'd been Cletus's best deputy.

One hung from her left shoulder where an arm was supposed to be, twisting down toward her ribcage, ending in a mass of mummified worms that looked more like a claw than five fingers . . .

"Helluva night."

"I know. We got guys out all over town helping the state police. Accidents, vandalism, you know the routine."

"Backward and forward," replied Cletus. He came up next to McGuire and dropped his voice to a whisper. "Is it him?"

That smile again. "It's him."

"Positive?"

"Enough that I called you. I figure you'll remember more of the specifics from last time than I do." He cast a glance at the file Cletus was holding. "Well, lookee there. I've had guys looking all over Hell's Half Acre for that thing."

"Must've fallen in a box the day I cleaned out my office."

McGuire laughed as they went inside, then pointed toward the conference room. "After you, Sheriff."

"Still honing that snappy wit of yours, I see."

"Mayor just hates it."

"So did I."

The two men marched into the room, closed the door behind them--

--and locked it.

three

Helen Winston never knew a day without a physical pain, never knew a night that didn't bring a trip to the medicine chest for pills, never knew what it felt like to glance in a mirror and not wince at the sight of the misshapen thing that stared back at her.

Not that she didn't like herself, far from it; there were many qualities about herself that she admired.

But there were four things she hated.

One hung from her left shoulder where an arm was supposed to be, twisting down toward her ribcage and ending in a mass of mummified worms that looked more like a claw than five fingers;

Another was attached to the left side below her waist, coming up three inches short of a normal leg's length with a foot that pointed in the wrong direction, making it necessary for her to wear a special platform held in place by a metal brace;

The third was strapped to her back in the form of an ugly, off-center hump that made her stoop to the right and put the majority of her weight on her good leg, causing it to cramp at least three times a day;

But the worst of them, the thing she despised most about herself, was her face.

Helen Winston's face was remarkably lovely. Whenever she found herself sitting in a bar or restaurant alone (which was often), she would inevitably attract the eyes of some man who would smile at her, perhaps nod, and eventually come over to join her. Then they'd catch sight of that arm and its claw, that leg and its brace, that back and its hump, blink a few times, stumble over their words, and quickly fabricate an excuse to leave her. "Sorry, I thought you were someone else" was rapidly becoming the most popular.

Then with a click, a shuffle, and a thump, Helen would totter off into her own special world of night's loneliness, going through the same tired motions of grading test papers, watching some television programs, and climbing into an empty bed -- but sometimes there was a number she would call, a very special number, that would help take care of this last.

A day in the life.

Helen Winston; woman, grade school teacher.

Helen Winston; fate-ordained human monstrosity.

Helen Winston; lonely.

She was just waking from a brief nap. She had no idea that she had been chosen.

Carefully.

A few of them had crawled up from their hiding place and marked the spot where she lay. Their blood grew hot and excited as each wondered if theirs would be the seed her fertile womb would receive.

Her perfect, fertile womb.

In the darkness, as she stirred, they shuddered.

The note had read:

*the thirst for blood it is in
their flesh before the old wound
can be healed there is flesh blood
flowing*

It was the first thing Cletus took from the file as he sat down across the table from the suspect. It had been pinned to the body of the first boy.

The table was an 8'x 3' pinewood job. Cletus, McGuire, and the still nameless suspect were at the end farthest from the door. At the other end stood two burly deputies, each holding a sawed-off 20-gauge pump-action shotgun. In the center of the table were all the items found in the suspect's possession at the time of the arrest: a torn Bugs Bunny t-shirt, a yo-yo, a bag of marbles, a baseball cap, a small pair of glasses--

--and a twenty-four inch sickle.

"Most of this stuff belonged to the three boys killed recently," said McGuire. "But look here -- this t-shirt belonged to the Simpson boy and the glasses are Danny Wilson's -- see here? The frame's taped together in the middle, and--"

"--I know," said Cletus. "His father told us how he'd fixed them just that day." He turned toward the suspect. "Where'd you get all these?"

The man didn't respond, only sat hugging himself and rocking back and forth. He was small and very well-groomed. He wore an expensive three-piece suit, though the rains had left their mark on the material. He didn't look like a serial killer, more like the vice-president of a bank. But wasn't that always the way? Four years ago this man had butchered two little boys, then disappeared. Now he'd come back for more, and three new boys were dead.

It ended here. Tonight.

Cletus picked up the sickle, examined it under the light. It looked ancient but felt solid. The handle was marble with detailed carvings of mythological figures. Cletus felt a sense of power in the weapon, almost like an electrical charge. It ran up his arm, snaked through his neck, and flooded his brain with the urge to swing out and take this guy's head off. The sickle would give him the strength. He put it down.

"Outside," he said to McGuire. The sheriff followed him.

"What is it?"

Cletus closed the door. "Let me ask you something, Joe. Doesn't all this strike you as just a little too convenient?"

"I don't follow."

"You got yourself this guy who's carrying stuff that can be linked to all five of the dead boys. He's also got a sickle, which had to be the murder weapon."

"... yeah?"

"How'd you find him?"

"Anonymous phone tip."

Cletus shook his head. "Something's not right. Has he said much?"

"Hardly a word. What're you thinking?"

Cletus raised a finger. "Not just yet. C'mon."

They went back in and found the suspect -- Cletus had decided to think of him as QuietGuy -- looking at the note. He was smiling.

Cletus snatched the paper from the man and sat down. "Something funny you care to share with the rest of us?"

"Maybe," said QuietGuy. Then he hugged himself and began rocking again.

Cletus looked at McGuire. "You read him his rights?"

"Whatta you think?"

"Always the eloquent one." He turned his attention back to QuietGuy. "You feel like chatting now?"

QuietGuy rocked back and forth.

Cletus leaned forward, pounded his finger against the note. "You know what this is from, don't you?"

No response.

"Well, just in case you forgot, it's from *The Odyssey* by Homer."

QuietGuy stopped rocking. His eyes locked on Cletus's face.

"You surprised a hick like me would know Homer? I read, yessir. All the classics. Modern stuff, too. You caught the new William Goldman yet? Hot stuff." He could feel something rising in his gut. His hands gripped the edge of the table. Cletus knew; as soon as QuietGuy's eyes met his own, he knew. The old instincts hadn't faded with time and empty bottles.

QuietGuy wasn't in this alone.

There was more to this than Joe McGuire suspected.

"I'm gonna say three names," whispered Cletus to QuietGuy, "and I want you to tell me if you know who I'm talking about."

QuietGuy sat frozen, eyes unblinking.

"Alecto," said Cletus--

--and QuietGuy swallowed hard--

--"Tisiphone,"--

--started shaking a little bit--

--"and Megara."

QuietGuy's shaking grew more violent but he didn't utter a sound.

Cletus sat back in his chair and lit a cigarette.

QuietGuy shook his head and giggled.

"Who the hell?" asked McGuire.

"What is it, Joe? Not up on your Greek mythology? Those are the three Furies. Alecto the Endless, Tisiphone the Retaliator, and Megaera the Envious Rager."

"I don't understand what--"

Cletus slammed his fist on the table and jumped to his feet, nearly knocking over his chair. "Goddamnit! I told them, didn't I, Joe? When the governor called in the Feds, I told them this guy had some kinda hard-on for Greek mythology, didn't I? Everyone thought I was just goin' off the deep end 'cause Esther had just left me, thought I was grabbing at straws so I wouldn't lose the election."

"They followed up on that, Cletus, they--"

--they sent one guy to the library for a couple of hours and decided I was full of shit. For a long time I thought maybe I was, but I've had a lot of time these past four years, time to do some reading of my own, some thinking." He spun around and pointed a finger at QuietGuy. "And you know what I'm talking about, don't you?"

McGuire grabbed his arm. "Cletus, this isn't the place to--"

--yeah, yeah, I know. Your office, right?" He stormed over to the door, unlocked then opened it. "Let's go."

As McGuire came over to Cletus, QuietGuy picked up the note, shook his head, and whispered, "Paris."

"What?" said McGuire.

"Paris," repeated Cletus.

"Is this guy French or something?"

"No. Paris is someone's name."

"Care to tell me whose?"

"Not until you've had a drink. You'll need it."

five

Helen rolled over in bed and groaned. Her back was throbbing but she refused to let that stop her. She had mythology reports to grade as soon as the agency man left. Her students were always pleased when she handed back papers on time. One of the few pleasures in her life was being treated with respect and not pity by her students. Of course, one shouldn't expect any less when teaching at a grade school for gifted children. They needed her and Helen liked being needed. If only for her mind.

A glass shattered in the kitchen and Helen snapped her eyes open.

"Dammit!" came the male voice from her kitchen. She blinked, trying to remember the man's name. Young man, blond hair, gray eyes, twenty-five or so, terrific body . . . what did the agency say his name was?

She couldn't remember. After a while they all got to be the same, especially after the lights went out; then

they were nothing more than a hot, sweaty body touching her where she needed to be touched, kissing her in places no freewilled lover ever would, slowly and patiently enduring the obstacle course of her body long enough to bring her home. And sometimes, like this guy, themselves.

She reached over to the bedside table, turned on the light, and picked up her purse. "What's your name again?" she called.

"Just call me Paris," said the voice from the kitchen. "Everyone does."

"Would you stop messing around and come here, please?" A few moments later he was standing by the bed, still naked. God, what a beauty he was!

"How much?"

"Usual agency fee," said Paris.

Helen sighed and began counting out the cash. "You were very nice. Most of the men they've sent me aren't usually so . . . considerate."

To her surprise, he knelt on the bed, bent down, and kissed her; a long, warm, deep kiss.

He pulled away. "You have the most beautiful face I've ever seen."

Her defensiveness kicked in, telling her that she'd just been patronized. She sat up and covered herself with the sheet. "Thank you. You've got your money, please go now."

"Why?"

"Because we're finished, that's why. Because I have to get dressed and it's a little awkward with--"

"Then I'll just go in the kitchen and finish making our dinner, how's that?"

She stared at him. "Do you always make dinner for your, uh, your . . . ?"

"No, but you're . . . special."

"I've been making my own meals for almost thirty years, thank you. You may not believe it, but I don't call to have a nurse sent here. I don't want your pity and I don't want any false sympathy. I'll tell the agency that you were nice. There. Now you don't have to suck up any more."

"Don't get nasty with me, Helen. I like you. I loved being with you."

She shot him an angry glance, not sure how to take that. "What is it with you?"

"Let's just say that the traditional female body does nothing for me and leave it at that." There was genuine admiration in his eyes. "Scrambled eggs and bacon, all right?"

"Fine."

He kissed her again. "I really do love your face." Then he went to the kitchen.

Helen was surprised at how quickly she was able to dress. Usually the leg brace gave her trouble but tonight it snapped into place without the slightest discomfort. It

wasn't until she was buttoning her blouse and looked across the room that she saw it.

The wall around the bedroom window was cracked. Not the paint, *the wall*.

And not only was it cracked, it seemed to be bulging inward as if the outside of the house had warped.

But there were other things.

--shuffle--

like the chipped plaster on the carpet

--clunk-thump--

like the odd angle of the window

--shuffle--

and the gaping, half-inch space between the wall and windowsill where a draft sliced through.

--clunk-thump.

The gap ran the entire length of the window as if something had been used to saw through. She reached out with her good arm and touched the window, gasping when she saw it ever-so-slightly swing -- not much but enough to let her know this section of wall was on the verge of collapsing. She stepped back and shook her head.

Not once in thirteen years had there been a problem with the house. This was an old house, they were supposed to be built better, weren't they? Three thousand dollars away from paying off the mortgage and now the place decides to fall apart! She nearly cursed out loud--

--then saw the odd substance that leaked from the gap and ran down the wall. Thick and gummy, white yet almost clear. She wondered if something hadn't gone wrong with the wiring, perhaps causing something in there to melt--

--which would be fine if this house was built with plastic and glue.

She reached out and touched the substance, shivered when her fingers made contact. She looked down and saw it pooling on the floor. There seemed to be quarts of the stuff. She shook her head and wiped her fingers on the skin of her malformed arm.

six

No one ever figured out the semen.

The three bodies they'd found had been drenched in it. Tests later showed it was animal semen but exactly what kind of animal no one would even speculate.

Of all the evidence, that was the one piece Cletus could never make fit into his theories.

He decided not to mention it as he entered McGuire's office. He started to sit behind the sheriff's desk, remembered who and what he was now, and took a chair on the other side. McGuire took off his hat, sat down, and pulled a small bottle of scotch from the bottom

drawer.

"Care for a snort?"

"Yeah," said Cletus. "And that's exactly why I'm not gonna have one. I left too much of me in bottles like that. Got any coffee?"

"Machine's right over there."

As Cletus was dumping the fifth spoonful of sugar into the cup, McGuire asked: "So what's all this about the Furies?"

"Follow me on this," said Cletus, sipping his coffee, deciding it wasn't sweet enough. "According to Greek mythology, when Father Heaven and Mother Earth were married at the beginning of time, They had children. Monsters. Horribly deformed and dangerous things. Mother Earth couldn't stand the sight of them so She asked Father Heaven to kill them but He didn't have the heart so instead He hid them away in the bowels of Mother Earth in places She wouldn't be able to find them. Great plan, huh?"

"By this time, She and Father Heaven had had themselves a bunch more children. This batch turned out a lot better than the first. The Titans and Cyclops and such. They ruled over all life on the planet. Anyway, Mother Earth found out that Father Heaven didn't kill the first batch and got real pissed off. She persuaded Cronus, Her youngest son, to attack his father." Cletus sat down across from McGuire and, without thinking, put his feet up on the desk.

"Here's where it gets interesting. Cronus took a sickle and -- the legend is real specific about this -- with an upward swing, castrated Father Heaven. The blood from His genitals fell on the Earth and soaked into the ground and gave birth to the Furies. Howling, gargoyle-like barking bitches, hellbent on shedding blood. The legend says -- depending on whether you follow the Greek or Roman version -- that the Furies will one day lead the first batch of children up to take possession of the world once again. It's said that the sound of thunder is the Furies cracking their whips against the sky and that lightning is the flash of the whip's metal spikes."

McGuire gave a long, low whistle. "That's pretty wild."

"I thought you might say something like that."

"So what's this guy trying to do?"

"According to the Greeks, the Furies could be summoned by the scent of blood from a virgin boy's testicles. Don't you get it? This guy you got in there has a buddy, and the two of them are trying to summon the Furies."

"So what happened with them?"

"How the hell am I supposed to know? Maybe him and his buddy had a lover's spat. One of 'em sure ratted on the other."

"You're forgetting one thing."

"What's that?"

"The animal semen."

Cletus looked at McGuire and nodded his head. "I was hoping you wouldn't bring that up."

"And why now? They've managed to hide for over four years. Christ! We had almost a hundred guys working on this and we still couldn't track 'em down."

"And?" said Cletus, prompting.

"And what?"

"C'mon, Joe! You go duck hunting! Think about it."

"... a decoy..."

"I knew you were the man for the job."

McGuire's face suddenly drained of color. "Do you think this whole thing was set up? That his buddy turned him in just to keep us busy while he--?"

"It's quite possible."

McGuire jumped up, spilled his drink, and sprinted toward the door. "Jesus! I gotta call everyone in, get some extra men, organize--"

Cletus grabbed his arm. "Take it easy. They've already killed three boys, one for each Fury. They don't need any more. Besides, if any kids were missing, someone would have called by now, don't you think?"

"Maybe, but I'd still--"

"When you were my deputy, Joe, the one bad habit you always had was acting just a little too fast. Not that quick reflexes aren't good, nosir, it's just you were always prone to jump before you looked. Now sit your ass down and get yourself calm, okay?"

"Don't order me around. I have this problem with authority figures." He took his seat behind the desk. "Would you mind telling me how *Paris* fits into all this?"

"Paris was mortal, a Greek soldier who was asked by Zeus to pick the most beautiful of the goddesses. It was said that no one had Paris's eye for beauty. He later fell in love with Helen of Troy. A war was started over her, you might recall."

"The Trojan War. I remember that much from high school." McGuire lit a cigarette and smiled at Cletus. "That's some reading you've done."

"I couldn't stop thinking about it, Joe. I had no idea how far apart Esther and me had grown. I just assumed that whatever interested me would interest her. I thought about them two boys so much, what they'd been put through, how they musta..." He shivered. "I thought about it so much I just stopped talking. Then I stopped sleeping because of the dreams. Then I couldn't stop draining bottles. Poor Esther. Worked all her life to give me a good home. She loved me, was true to me, put up with my moods and cheered me when I was down, and I deserted her. We should've gone on to a nice time, the two of us, but somewhere in there I just lost whatever it was about me that she fell in love with. Couldn't much expect her to stick around and watch me commit suicide on the installment plan, now could I? So she left and I

dived into my reading, my thinking. Every time I looked in the mirror I saw the faces of those little boys. Lost myself." His eyes met the sheriff's. "No more, Joe, hear me? We're gonna nail both these bastards, tonight! He's gonna tell us where his buddy is if I have to beat it out of him."

"Can't let you do that."

Cletus smiled. "If you do it, it's excessive force, police brutality, all that good bullshit that a lawyer can use to get the case thrown out of court. If I do it, well, then, that makes things a little different."

"I never thought of it that way."

Their eyes met.

"I want 'em, Joe. Goddamnit, I want 'em." He felt one hot tear slip from his eye and course down his cheek.

"So do I," replied McGuire.

When they returned from the conference room, McGuire told the two deputies to leave. They looked at Cletus, smiled, and did as they were told. McGuire stood at the door, staring at QuietGuy but speaking to Cletus.

"Rain's stopped. It's a nice, cool night and it's getting a bit stuffy in here. Think I'll take all the guys outside for some fresh air. You mind keeping an eye on our pal here for, say, ten minutes?"

"Not at all," said Cletus, closing the door behind McGuire. Then he reached under the back of his jacket, pulled out a Colt Commander 9mm Parabellum, and turned to QuietGuy.

"Tell me about Paris," he said.

seven

Helen sat on the bed and stared at the window, then looked at the substance on her arm.

For some odd reason she thought of all the nights she'd lain alone with dreams of having a body that matched the beauty of her face. They were laughable fantasies, always with a handsome hero. She smiled bitterly to herself, wondering if she'd ever find a man to play Perseus to her Andromeda, Pygmalion to her Galatea, Pyramus to her Thisbe--

--or Paris to her Helen.

She turned and looked toward the kitchen.

Paris to her Helen.

Why hadn't that registered with her before?

She went into the kitchen and looked at the young man standing near the stove.

"What's your name?"

"I told you once," he replied.

"Yeah, I know. *Paris*, right?"

"Right. Sit down, this is almost ready."

She took her seat at the table, wincing from the pain in her back. She could tell already it was going to be a lousy weekend; first the wall, now this smartass kid

trying to keep a straight face while inside -- she knew as surely as she was sitting there -- he was laughing at her.

"So," she said, deciding to beat him at his own game, "do you like your work?"

"I love it. Do you like yours?"

"I have fine students."

"And I'll bet they find this stuff as fascinating as you do, huh?"

She stared at his back, made no reply.

"It must be something, exposing all those bright, young minds to this ancient knowledge. I mean, I know that mythology is only one of the courses you teach, but it must be the most interesting." He laughed. "Tell me, do your fantasies about Perseus and Pygmalion keep your bed warm at night?"

"How dare you--"

He whirled around and set her plate down. "Here we go. For The Face That Bounced A Thousand Hips." He laughed again.

Helen didn't stop to think and didn't want to. She pushed up from her chair as quickly as she could and slapped him across the face so hard that he reeled back against the sink, dropping his own plate and falling to the floor just as the plate shattered, spitting sharp slivers over his exposed chest. The fury which had propelled Helen to strike out ebbed away immediately, leaving a dull aching blush on her face. Even though he'd infuriated her, even though he'd deserved to be slapped, Helen was at once sorry she'd done it.

And then she realized that she'd slapped him with her *left* hand. A powerful, dizzying sensation sent her back down into her chair. She blinked her eyes several times and looked at her left hand. Watched as one finger--

--then all of its fingers--

--fingers that hadn't moved since the day she was born, fingers that were supposed to be useless, started moving for chrissakes. She opened her mouth and gasped, gulping down air as she realized her arm, her useless, mangled arm, had become long and slender and beautiful, with a perfect, delicate hand at its end. She blinked again, tried to clear away the image because it wasn't true, it couldn't be, dead limbs didn't just come to life and now, now her fingers were flexing and she shrieked, feeling her arm tingle into full life, fingers wiggling as if saying to the world, *hello, yes we've been asleep but now we're back and it's kind of nice here, don't you think, and didn't we have a grand time slapping that little shit's face?*

She felt something slip from her eye and course down her cheek. She opened the fingers of her left hand, closed them, made a fist, opened them again, snapped with her thumb and middle finger, a wide and radiant smile crossing her face as the sound reverberated within the small confines of her kitchen. She felt the blood

rushing to her temples, took a deep breath, and -- for the first time in her life, for the first time in thirty-nine years -- wiped the tears from her eyes with both hands, forgetting about Paris, forgetting about the wall, the window, and the awful substance that dripped--

"What's the matter with your arm?" asked Paris.

"Uh . . . I don't really . . . the window, there was some stuff and I wiped it . . ."

Paris looked in the bedroom, saw the window, the wall. "They know," he whispered. "*They know.*"

"Who knows? What are you talking about?" She was suddenly very frightened.

"Tell me," said Paris, "do you and your students really know what you're dealing with?"

"W-what?"

He knelt and took her face in his hands. "All these precious, gifted children that you teach. Do they have any idea of the true nature of these myths?"

Watched as one finger--

--then all of its fingers--

--fingers that hadn't moved since the day she was born, fingers that were supposed to be useless, started moving for chrissakes . . .

Helen shook her head; not so much in answer to his question as to clear her mind and calm herself. She didn't know what was happening but she knew her head needed to be clear. Needed. Feeling needed.

Paris gripped her face harder. "Answer me."

She looked into his face. Her heart skipped a beat. His eyes were wide and solid black. Dark, pupilless marbles.

He quickly stood, seeming larger now, so much taller, angrier--

--so much more dangerous.

"Poor, pathetic people," he whispered, stomping back and forth across the kitchen like a caged animal. He seemed to be getting bigger by the second. His chest heaved with fury and fear.

"You've always been fascinated by these myths, haven't you? But none so much as the ones about monsters. And why do you spend your nights reading about them? Because even with all the books, all this glorious human knowledge, you can't find one reason for any of it, can you? You can't find one reason why people like you are born deformed, why there are freaks and retard. Oh sure, you can find theories about extra chromosomes and why cells mutate, but in all the words you can't find one explanation as to *why they exist in the first place!*" His

face was red and swollen with the heat of his anger.

Helen looked quickly at her arm -- her lovely, rejuvenated arm -- and saw that it was shaking.

Paris whirled around, yanked open the utensil drawer, and snatched up the silverware tray. He quickly rummaged through the pieces until he found what he was looking for.

A long, sharp, gleaming carving knife.

Helen shifted in her chair and eyed the back door a few feet away. Even with the leg brace she thought she might be able to make it. Just get there before him, yank open the door, and scream bloody murder. This wasn't a rough neighborhood, people around here called the police at the slightest sign of--

--then she saw the small chain lock, ever in its place. That would take precious time away but she had two arms now, two hands -- she couldn't deny that any more, the feeling was too real -- and she might pull it off in time but--

--the bathroom!

She could heave a chair between them, run into the bathroom, lock the door, and scream out the window.

For the first time she was glad that her bathroom window faced the street.

Paris stood looking at her, twisting the knife around, admiring the glistening metal of the blade the same way he'd admired her body. "Well, Helen," he said, "I can tell you why those things exist. I can tell you where they came from."

He took a few steps away from her, half-turning toward the window over the sink. "I told Danny Wilson and the other boy all about it. I can show you what I showed them, things you never imagined,"--

--his grip tightened around the knife's handle--

--"things no human being has ever seen before. And lived."

Helen swallowed hard. *Danny Wilson*. She remembered him. Well-behaved boy, very bright, always had tape holding his glasses together. Butchered along with Jim Simpson four years ago. He'd only been her student for a month when he was killed. Oh, God! And now the killings had started again.

Paris stood over her, his eyes still wide black marbles.

She craned back to see him.

She hadn't been imagining things. He was getting larger. She didn't know why and didn't care; all she wanted was to *please God* get away from this madman alive.

"I have to tell you a story, Helen, so you'll understand what's going to happen to you. To us." His voice was different now, deeper, more powerful, an echo from ancient caves.

He smiled. "When Father Heaven and Mother Earth were married at the beginning of time, They had many children. Monsters. Horribly deformed and dan-

gerous things . . ."

eight

An ashen-faced Cletus opened the station door and said, "Joe, would you come here, please?" He was drenched in a clear, thick substance.

McGuire followed Cletus in. "Well?"

Cletus, shaking, replied, "He's dead, Joe. I swear to God I didn't -- he -- c'mon, see for yourself."

The two men stepped into the conference room.

The walls and ceiling were covered in the same thick substance as Cletus's clothing. The table had been split in half. The contents of the file were scattered everywhere.

"What the fuck did you do, Cletus?"

"I only hit him a few times, I swear to you, Joe."

McGuire pressed his hands against his eyes and swallowed. "Christ! Where is he?"

Cletus took him by the arm and stepped around a section of table.

McGuire gasped.

The sickle's blade was buried in the wall almost to the handle. Hanging from the exposed portion of blade was a suit of skin, split open from the center. There was no blood anywhere.

McGuire took a deep breath and leaned against the wall.

At his feet were the shredded remains of the suspect's clothing.

A few feet away from that was something out of a nightmare.

"God, Cletus," said McGuire, "what is it?"

"That's him, Joe. That's what he really looked liked underneath his skin."

McGuire turned and emptied the contents of his stomach into a nearby wastebasket.

"Listen to me, Joe," said Cletus. "When you left I took out my gun and knocked him across the jaw. I tried to get him to tell me where his buddy was."

"You brought a gun into my station?"

"So what?"

McGuire was shuddering but managed to keep his composure. "You know damn well I can't present this . . . thing as a suspect. We had a human being in here fifteen minutes ago, Cletus, a human being who's been skinned alive. Oh, God." He pinched the bridge of his nose. "I'm gonna lose my job because of this, you dumb bastard."

Cletus grabbed McGuire's arm. "No, you're not, because the guy who killed the first two boys is still out there and we can get him!"

McGuire looked up. "Where?"

"I'm not sure, but--"



"Oh, that's just great! You're not sure! That'll go over big with the mayor."

"Then look at this," said Cletus, shoving some damp papers into McGuire's hand.

"What is it?"

"Remember Paris?"

McGuire uncrumpled the pages, wiped them off. "Yeah, so?"

Cletus got right up in his face. "When Zeus asked Paris to choose the most beautiful of the goddesses, He expected him to pick Aphrodite, but Paris didn't -- he chose Helen, a mortal woman. The Gods were divided over this. Zeus sided with Paris and the other Gods were angered. So they found a Trojan soldier who was rumored to have an equal eye for beauty. His name was Menelaus. But he fell in love with Helen and fought Paris for her love. It was one of the things that started the Trojan War."

McGuire slammed his fist against a chair. "So what? I don't need a goddamn history lesson, Cletus, I need a suspect. *A living suspect!*"

Cletus pointed toward the conference room. "He told me his name, Joe. *He* was Menelaus."

"So you were right. These guys had some kinda thing for Greek mythology."

Cletus raised a finger and smiled. "The first two murdered boys went to the same school. The Anderson

Institute For Gifted Children."

"We knew that last time. It was one of the first things the FBI checked out."

"Right. But they had no teacher in common so the Feds dropped it. Big mistake."

McGuire looked at the pages. "I don't--"

"I feel like a moron for not seein' this sooner. There are three teachers at Anderson named Helen. One teaches science, another teaches math, but the third teaches three courses: English, Appreciation of the Modern Novel, and Mythology."

McGuire's eyes widened. "Holy shit."

"That's not all," said Cletus, sorting through the pages until he came to the teacher's list. "Look where she's from."

McGuire took the page and read. "Troy, Ohio."

"Paris, Menelaus, and Helen of Troy," said Cletus. "This list her current address?"

"At the bottom."

Their eyes met.

"He told me his name," said Cletus. "Then he said that Paris had been given his chance and failed, that's why he'd been sent. But Paris had tricked him, he said. The 'others' would soon know and would kill him and Paris. What 'others' I don't know, but he was scared. Said he was dead regardless of what he did now, so he took the sickle and split himself open. Took off his disguise."

Asked me to kill him before the 'others' got him. Then he came at me and I shot the thing." Cletus wiped something from his eye.

"I'm sorry but I was *scared!* I'm scared right now, more than I've ever been."

"Let's go," said McGuire, jumping to his feet.

"Just you and me, Deputy?" said Cletus.

McGuire smiled. "Just you and me, Sheriff."

nine

" . . . the Furies would return and lead the First Children up from darkness to take possession of the world once again."

Paris smiled, a smile that was almost tender--

--Helen took a breath--

--and made her move.

She slammed shut the mythology text book and flung it at his head with all the strength she could find; it should have struck him at the base of his left temple because no human was fast enough to dodge something like that but he cocked his wide, monstrous hand up in front of his face, caught the book with three fingers, and crumpled it like a piece of tissue paper. He breathed heavily as he continued to grow, his head almost touching the ceiling. The clothes on his body shredded apart.

He stood naked and hunched over, a good three feet taller.

That was the moment Helen realized she was in the presence of something not human.

She tried to turn and run toward the bathroom but the damn leg brace--

--shuffle, *clunk-thump*--

--tripped her up. She lost her balance and shrieked, her arms pinwheeling as she toppled into the chair and fell across it like an animal across an altar. All she could do for a moment was lie there and try to breathe, try to stop the pain and get some balance. Plaster dropped from the ceiling in large chunks and struck the back of her head as Paris started to move toward her. She reached down and gripped the legs of the chair, pulled in a breath, then rolled over and jerked the chair up in front of her, holding it over her head. The pain in her back shot into her belly and cramped her. Hot, angry tears burst from her eyes as she gritted her teeth and vowed to fight him until she was dead. The kitchen lights shattered from the pressure of Paris's back. A shower of sparks fell over his shoulder and rolled down his arms.

He tore the chair from her hands, then knelt down next to her legs.

"I'm not going to hurt you, my love."

Helen tried to move away but he gripped her braced leg and pulled her toward him.

He inserted one of his fingers under the first clamp of the brace and snapped it apart.

"You won't be needing this," he said.

Then he snapped the second clamp.

"Story's not finished yet. You see, Father Heaven forgot about the First Children for a very long time. Many of them died waiting for His return. But not all of them."

He tightened his grip on her leg and snapped the third clamp.

"A few survived. He saw how much they wanted to live and was touched. After all, they had outlived the Cyclops and Titans and Kraaken. They deserved to go on."

The fourth clamp went. Rivulets of sweat dripped off Helen's forehead and into her eyes.

"So He sent them mates. But these mates were human women. From their wombs sprang forth the sick and deformed, the damaged, the retarded. And these offspring made their way to the surface and intermingled with humankind, producing others that were like themselves. Father Heaven tried to gather up these new offspring but by the time He realized what had happened, the seeds of the First Children had spread so widely He could no longer recognize the new generation. What had marked them, what had made them special had been distilled, filtered down, if you will, by combining with human blood. So He gathered what he could and returned them to the bowels of Mother Earth, promising to release them when one was born who was clearly marked as both human and not. Only then could He allow the Furies to be summoned."

The last clamp went and Paris yanked away the leg brace. "But this woman had to be very special, very beautiful, very wise."

"W-why me?" choked Helen.

"Your face was the answer, my love. Measureless time ago, a great war was fought over the woman whose lingering seed gave you that face." He leaned closer. "Father Heaven returned to us many nights ago. He returned to His children in darkness and told us it was time to summon the Furies. Then He told us of you. And we chose you." He touched her face with more gentleness than Helen had ever known.

"But I wanted you for myself, Helen. I was denied you once before. Never again. I was the first to be sent up. Father Heaven gave me the sickle Cronus used to castrate Him. I had only a few days to find three boys, three untouched, virginal boys, and bleed them. The Three Furies must be summoned together. One boy for each. But I failed. I saw you and all thought of my mission fled. I would not be allowed to rejoin the others below but I didn't care."

Helen struggled and tried to pull away from him.

"Do you realize the price I've paid for your love? After the Great War I was punished for my sin of choosing you over the goddesses. I was turned into one of the creatures Father Heaven had hidden away. I was

forced to live down among the darkness. My only comfort was that my enemy, Menelaus, was made unhuman, also. But the memory of your loveliness kept my seed strong." He released her and stood.

"I waited for the moment to come to you. But Father Heaven sent Menelaus to the surface. I had to pass the sickle to him so he could make the necessary sacrifices. But that's not all I passed to him. You see, my love, whoever sacrifices a young boy to the Furies must keep something that belonged to that child to use as a talisman, a controlling charm. I gave the two I had to Menelaus. The fool actually thanked me. He seemed to think that the creatures had erased my hatred for him and what he did to us during the Trojan War. But I have no affection for him. Father Heaven made us both unhuman, yes, but that did not make us brothers. Once he'd taken the talisman I made a phone call to the authorities. I imagine they have him by now."

He raised the knife.

"...please," whispered Helen.

"Not to worry, my love. I won't harm you. But since I've revealed part of my soul to you, it's only fitting that you see the rest."

He smiled. "Look from what you sprang."

With a powerful downward arc he thrust the knife deep into his stomach and dragged the blade across.

ten

McGuire asked: "You got anything besides the Colt?"

Cletus pressed down on the accelerator and ran a stop sign. "Look under the blanket on the back seat."

McGuire did and found one Mossholder handle-grip twelve-gauge shotgun and one Uzi. "These look new."

"They are," replied Cletus, squinting at the road. It was starting to rain again; not much, just a light drizzle, but he knew it would get worse.

Things always got worse.

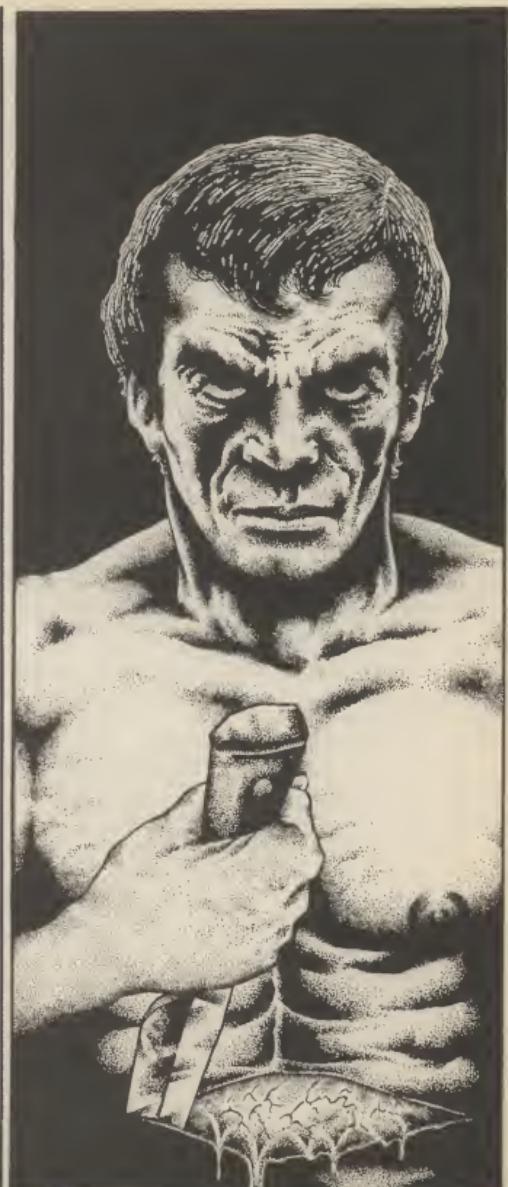
He cast a quick glance at McGuire who was loading a clip into a .357 Magnum Auto-Mag. "Correct me if I'm wrong, but I don't think that's a standard issue gun, is it?"

McGuire grunted then said: "Did I hassle you about that monster you're carrying?"

"Forget I said anything."

They were now five miles from Helen Winston's house. Cletus could feel his pulse racing. Both he and McGuire knew that Paris would be there. They had only their gut instincts, but between them there was almost fifty years of experience and they both knew enough not to question those instincts.

The rain was coming down harder. Thunder, a



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flash of lightning. Cletus thought he heard the sound of a whip being snapped.

He cast a glance at McGuire. "What?"

"We have to take him alive, Cletus."

"If possible." It was tough talk, but that's all it was -- talk. Cletus was so scared he almost couldn't breathe.

"If he's like his buddy," said McGuire, "then I'll need living proof. I'm gonna have to prove that they . . . ain't human."

Cletus looked up as the rain began pinging against the roof of the car. It was almost hypnotic, that sound.

--tappity-tap-tap . . . tappity-tap-tap--

"I'm sorry about Esther," said McGuire. "And I'm sorry no one believed you before."

"Not your fault, Joe. You came through for me, that's all that's important."

They both stared out into the night.

"I'm scared, Cletus."

"Welcome to the club." He slid the Mossholder within his reach. "How do you want to do this?"

"You go through the front and I'll take the back."

"When do the guys at the station expect you to call in?"

"I told them thirty minutes. If they don't hear from me, we're gonna have lots of company."

The car hit a puddle and started to fishtail but Cletus managed to keep it on the road.

Three miles.

Thunder. A flash of lightning.

Was it just his imagination or was the rain--

--tappity-tap-tap . . . tappity-tap-tap--

-- sounding a little *too* rhythmic?

The car seemed to shift despite his efforts, as if something were throwing it off-balance.

The rain pelted across the windshield. A chill crept down Cletus's spine as he suddenly remembered something from his readings over the years.

The Furies always appeared during storms. Their whips brought the thunder and lightning, and the rains gave them cover.

Too rhythmic.

He slowed as he rounded a corner, felt the car lurch, and looked over at McGuire--

--who was looking up.

--tappity-tap-tap . . . tappity-tap-tap--

"What the--?"

He never finished.

--tappity-tap-tap-tap-scrape-scrape--
SCRAAAAGGGGGAAPE--

The roof buckled in from the center. The dome light exploded into McGuire's face and he fell forward, hands clutching at his eyes. It would only be a matter of moments before the thing on the roof broke through, so in both panic and anger, Cletus reached up and began beating against the bulge with his fist. His eyes weren't on the road, they were looking at the growing bulge but

then McGuire screamed and Cletus turned, saw--

--jesusgodthatcantbewhatithinkitis--

--the *talon*, the goddamned corded *talon* ram through the opening, sharp and glistening, jerking back and forth, opening and closing, trying to latch onto flesh and rend it to shreds and Cletus didntcouldntwouldnt panic, he was too goddamn angry now because McGuire was bleeding and howling in pain and this thing wasn't finished yet--

--he glanced at the road, pressed down on the accelerator, pulled out the Colt, and fired three shots through the roof but the talon kept coming. Cletus screamed as one of its points gouged his cheek. The pain burst through him like fire as he looked in the windshield and saw the reflection of three little boys staring back so he took a deep breath, gripped the wheel--

--and slammed on the brakes.

The car jerked to a halt as the talon vanished through the hole and something huge whalloped against the hood and bounced off onto the road.

Cletus put the car into drive, then roared forward and drove over the thing. Bits and pieces of it flew up and splattered against the side windows as Cletus backed up again, pushing the car back and forth; loud, agonized shrieks broke through the night as the thing was crushed under the wheels.

Bits and pieces of it flew up and splattered against the side windows as Cletus backed up again, pushing the car back and forth; loud, agonized shrieks broke through the night as the thing was crushed under the wheels.

Cletus backed up one more time, tires screaming; the stench of burning rubber filled the interior of the car, the gears scraped as he pressed on the accelerator and brought the car forward again, one last time, holding steady, spinning the tires, grinding the thing under the treads, watching slimy chunks of it fly in every direction, hearing its cries fade into whimpering and then a choke and then nothing. Nothing at all.

Cletus kept the car still, his breathing hard and painful, his head throbbing, his heart hammering against his ribs. McGuire fumbled around until he was sure the car wasn't moving anymore, then reached over and clamped onto Cletus's arm, pulling himself up. His face was bleeding from the shards of dome light glass and one eye was swollen shut. Cletus backed up one more time and heard the engine cough, sputter, then die.

"How bad are you hurt?"

"Not . . . not too bad," said McGuire, pulling out a handkerchief and wiping blood from his face. "What in God's name was that?"

Cletus tried to start the car. Nothing but a click. He tried again with the same results, cursed, then flung open the door, happy to fill his lungs with the cold dampness. The exhaust in the car was choking him. The rain spit into the car, an icy and welcome reminder that there was still a world out there, a world with wind and cold and life-giving rain.

Cletus sat still for a moment, letting the chill soak in. It felt good, this cold. His senses became more attuned. He took several deep breaths to steady himself and thought again of Esther. He'd never really believed her when she told him how proud she was of the work he'd done. No. She was just trying to -- ah, the hell with it.

He gripped the Mossholder, pumped a round into the chamber, and climbed out. His legs were shaking as he stepped toward the front of the car.

He hoped the thing was dead.

He hoped the rain let up.

And he hoped that he and McGuire had the strength to make it to Helen Winston's house on foot.

eleven

Paris flipped the costume of flesh and muscle over his head.

Helen couldn't look away.

He burst forth from the cocoon of human flesh in all his deformed hideousness, staring at her through bulbous insect-like eyes. He was huge and overpowering.

And Helen was mesmerized.

Everything about Paris was repulsive and foul yet there was, she knew, a *perfection* in his malformity, one that she could not help but feel a kinship with.

So hideous.

Yet so glorious. Something that had lived in the bowels of the earth since the beginning of Night and Gods.

All the Gods of legend.

All the monsters of Night.

Helen looked at her arm, remembered what it had been, and understood. Her heart broke at the thought of the loneliness Paris and his kind had endured over the centuries. Had they, like her, been pitied rather than accepted? Had they lived with memories of mocking laughter and horrified stares?

Yes. She understood.

The thing that was Paris reached out with one clawed hand and pulled her toward itself. Its mandibles parted, revealing the maw. It balanced above her and spread her legs apart.

Helen opened her mouth, feeling Paris's breath

pound down as something cold and leathery slipped from his maw and into her mouth, probing the back of her throat.

It felt hideous, yet renewing.

She gagged only once before releasing herself to a dream that was more memory than fancy. Once again she was a child sitting alone on her front porch, storybooks in hand, wishing that one of the neighborhood children would come up and talk to her. Not for long, just enough that she could tell Mommy that she'd made a new friend, that she hadn't been spending too much time alone with her books, books that Mommy said weren't good for her but that wasn't right, these books are fun and I can't really do anything with the other kids, they all think I'm some kind of monster but maybe, maybe one of these days they'll wonder what it is that I'm reading and I'll show them and pretty soon I might have a whole bunch of friends who'll sit out here with me and we can read each other stories and it'll be so much fun!

Then the memory faded and Mommy's face became Helen's own, only there was something different about it, something ancient and powerful. She turned toward herself, clad in a long flowing gown of white satin.

"I've waited so long," she whispered. Helen stood facing herself in the heart of the Acropolis, in the temple of Apollo on Mount Pernassus. Below, the Gulf of Corinth foamed, its waters crashing against the shore. Helen was power here; she was beauty and perfection and grace and she thanked Paris in a silent part of her soul. A deep and dormant love was re-awakening in her, a love for herself -- and a recognition of her long-lost, timeless beauty.

She felt him enter between her legs, pumping.

Something thick and wet covered her body.

The waters of Corinth carried the Siren's song, a serenade for their lovemaking. Distant voices across the seas of time.

Paris pushed himself in deeper. The pain was exquisite and Helen gasped and moaned, pulling him closer.

The great columns of Apollo's temple began to tremble.

Helen arched her back and screamed.

She was perfection now. Grace. Beauty. Her long wait was over. The world would no longer pity those like her or look upon them with disgust.

Come worship, she thought as her body bucked and shuddered.

Come champion me.

twelve

Cletus examined the pulpy mess that covered the front of the car. Then he looked down the street at the houses.

No lights were on. Not one person had stepped out to see what the commotion had been.

The area was still as death, as if every living creature had been frozen in time, unaware of what was happening. Did these things have that kind of power? Could they move in another dimension, separate from humankind's own?

Cletus tried to clear these thoughts away. They created a clutter he didn't need right now.

A sound.

He stopped.

It was behind him.

Deep and guttural. Wheezing, angry, staggered breaths.

He felt his heart press against his ribcage. He gripped the Mossholder and slowly turned around.

The thing dropped from the sky like a curse from Heaven and landed on top of the car. Sporadic flashes of lightning enabled Cletus to see it in bits and pieces.

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A flash -- legs, four powerful legs that ended in corded talons ...

A flash -- legs, four powerful legs that ended in corded talons, legs that supported a thick and hard-muscled body . . . another flash -- arms, muscular human arms protruding from massive shoulders, hands wide and clenched . . . big flash now, a roar of thunder -- a long, segmented tail, thrashing back and forth . . . three quick flashes -- two long horns jutting from a semi-human face, thick spit spraying from its mouth, eyes red and glowing, it was big, maybe eight feet tall--

--a final flash and he saw it whole, saw it ram one of its arms through the roof of the car and wrench Joe McGuire's head from his shoulders, pull it out in a spray of blood, and devour it in three bites.

Cletus ran forward screaming in rage, raised the shotgun, and saw the vein-streaked wing flap down toward his face. Something sharp caught the upper corner of his lip and tore away a small section. He staggered back and slipped in a puddle of blood, nearly losing his grip on the Mossholder, never taking his eyes off the monstrosity that faced him from the top of the car, its wingspan twice the size of a man. Cletus felt his breath escape him not in fear but a perverse kind of awe.

"The tight sinewy muscles of its legs rippled as it swayed from side to side. Its skin was rough and scaly. Dozens of stone-shaped boils covered its torso, each of them raw and seeping, ripped open by its every breath. From its left side a large pink flap of flesh fluttered against the wind where a wing had been; the other unfurled toward Cletus again and he jumped back, seeing the long, triple-jointed fingers of its hand. It gripped a long whip.

Cletus saw its nostrils flare, a dark, slimy liquid dripping from them and onto its lips, thin, crusty lips curled back to reveal jagged rows of yellow, rat-like teeth. Heavy waves of matted hair hung from beneath its chin, swarming with maggots. It twisted its mouth in an effort to get something out, words maybe, but all that emerged was a terrible howling.

Its eyes locked on Cletus's face.

He raised the Mossholder and--

--nothing left but blame--

--took aim as the Fury pulled back its arm.

Cletus couldn't dodge the whip in time. Twelve feet long, its tip a cluster of razors, the leather thick and studded with hundreds of tiny metal spikes. The Fury yanked back with incredible force, snapping the leather frighteningly close to Cletus's neck. He hit the ground belly-first and felt a few of the spikes nip at his thigh before the Fury snapped back again. Cletus figured he had maybe four seconds if he was lucky. He scrambled forward on hands and knees, still gripping the shotgun but then came the hiss of leather. He twisted around and saw the whip wrap around his right leg, then the Fury pulled back, tightening the spikes and leather. Cletus screamed as it tore through his flesh and gnawed his tendons. The Fury tossed back its head and let out a howl that rose toward the gathering storm. Cletus covered his ears and tried to silence the horrible sound, then yanked himself forward, the spikes ripping deeper into his leg, the pounding rain nearly blinding him. He reached out toward the handle of the car door, gripped it in his fingers, pulled himself up onto the seat and pumped three rounds through the roof.

The creature's bitch-howling grew worse. Cletus felt the whip slacken and the pain ebbed but did not cease. He took a deep breath, pumped another shell into the Mossholder's chamber, and fired through the blood-caked hole above him. The thing keened and pulled back, tightening the whip once more. Cletus fired through the roof again then again then again. The remaining metal of the roof buckled upward as something thick and black spattered down onto his face, mixing with the rain and hissing as it seared his flesh.

The whip went slack. Cletus pulled his mangled leg from its grip. A large piece of something covered in stinking, dripping boils flopped through the opening in the roof. Cletus looked at the windshield and saw the

wing covering it. Above him was a wide veil of tumors and gore. He pushed himself from the car into the street. The pain in his leg was nearly unbearable; he prayed he wouldn't pass out. He had to know, had to make sure...

He pulled himself up along the edge of the door until his hand gripped a section of roof, then hoisted himself up and--

--right into the thing's waiting face.

Its eyes were alive with anger. It curled back its lips, snout wide and dripping, and for a moment Cletus feared that it would lurch forward and take his head off like it had Joe McGuire's, but it only opened its wide, awful mouth. The stench of rotting meat blew into Cletus's face as a long, slithering gray tongue rolled out of its mouth--

--Cletus fell back onto the pavement. Above him, the tongue oozed over the side of the roof, jerked twice, then was still. A thin trickle of black liquid ran down its center and dripped toward the ground, each drop hissing as it hit the pavement.

It was dead.

For a few moments Cletus sat there weeping; weeping in fear, weeping for the loss of his friend; weeping for the five little boys.

He tore off his belt, wrapped it tightly around the mangled portion of his leg to stop the bleeding, then forced himself up.

He dropped the shotgun and grabbed the Uzi, snatched his Colt and McGuire's Auto-Mag then, for good measure, picked up the whip and wound it carefully around one shoulder, its handle within easy reach.

He turned and pushed himself in the direction of Helen Winston's house.

Something in the back of his brain reminded him that there was still one Fury left but he chose not to think about that.

His mind was too full of Paris.

But he no longer blamed himself. Esther would have been proud.

Grimacing from the pain, he broke into a staggered run.

thirteen

Helen lay staring at the ceiling, her passion spent for the moment. Visions of her past on the Acropolis faded into the soft white glow of an outside streetlight, filtering through the window blinds, ethereal and peaceful, giving a vague human form to the blond man sitting opposite her.

She smiled.

Paris had donned his disguise once more. She blinked, took a breath, and sat up.

"Do you understand now?" asked Paris.

Her voice was hoarse from her cries. "I always understood. I just never knew." She stretched out her arms and reached down to caress her two, long, slender, perfect legs, even in length and so beautiful. Men would die for the chance to touch these legs.

And so they shall, she thought, reaching behind to rub the center of her smooth, painless, perfect back.

From somewhere in the distance she could feel the vibrations of many great, majestic things burrowing through the earth toward her house.

Paris rose to his feet. "They're coming. We have to leave now."

Helen remained unmoving, unblinking, admiring her perfect body in the glow of the streetlight.

**

Cletus fell twice but managed to pull himself up and continue. Beneath his feet he could feel the ground trembling. He cast a quick glance over his shoulder and saw a large winged form following him. It passed through the storm clouds and swooped lower but did not attack.

He collided into a row of trash cans, spun around, dropped to one knee, then pushed forward. He was only a few dozen yards from her house.

He lifted the Uzi, flicked off the safety.

**

"Do they all want me as much as you?" asked Helen.

"None want you so much as I, my love. But they'll fight for you. After they've punished me, they'll fight."

"Why will they punish you?"

"Father Heaven was to couple with you first, then we, the First Children, were to share you. They will kill me if they get the chance. But Mother Earth has promised me sanctuary if I can get away with you by my side."

Helen began to laugh; softly at first, then building to a loud crescendo with every flash of lightning and clap of thunder.

"We'll begin The Age all over again, Helen. We'll make this world anew. We'll rid it of all the rot and ignorance this pitiful human race has dumped on it. And it will be ours. But we have to leave *now!*"

"I don't think so."

She watched as Paris's eyes grew wide with terror. She continued laughing.

"Please," he said. "I beg you--"

"If you love me," she said, "then you'll fight for me. You will champion my honor."

The house began to vibrate. Windows shattered. The walls began splitting apart. From below came

screams for life, for love, for revenge.

Her smile widened as she touched every inch of her body. "Prove your love for me and I will bring forth many children for you. We will ascend the New Acropolis and listen as the Sirens serenade us."

The front door blew off its hinges and a man rushed in, leveling a machine gun at Paris's chest.

"Don't move!" screamed Cletus.

Helen giggled. "Two champions to defend my honor?"

Cletus turned and looked at the naked woman who stood on the other side of the room.

He froze.

The pain in his leg ebbed away under a rush of fire that filled his chest.

She was the most stunningly beautiful woman he'd ever seen.

"Well, Paris," said Helen. "It seems you've some competition."

Paris glowered. "You always were an arrogant one."

"Yes. But think what pleasures await the victor."

The house was shaking apart now, chunks of plaster and sections of beam falling around them. Cletus pressed himself against what remained of a wall, still holding the gun on Paris, who turned to him and said: "If you want to live, then give me the whip."

"Fuck you."

Something large and heavy landed on the roof of the house, howling.

Cletus whirled around and began firing at the shadows emerging from every corner.

"Who shall have me?" said Helen.

"PLEASE!" screamed Paris.

Cletus fell to the floor as the house was rocked from underneath. The Uzi flew from his grip and smashed into a far wall. He saw the ghosts of five little boys standing in the glow of the streetlight and called out his wife's name. McGuire's deputies would be screaming down on the house at any moment with the state police in tow.

Cletus knew it would do no good.

"May the best man win," said Helen.

There wasn't even time to scream. The floor splintered upward as the first of Helen's many champions crawled out.

The Fury exploded through the roof and swooped down, howling in ecstasy.

The Age had begun.

The New Acropolis began to rise.

And rain drowned out the screaming.

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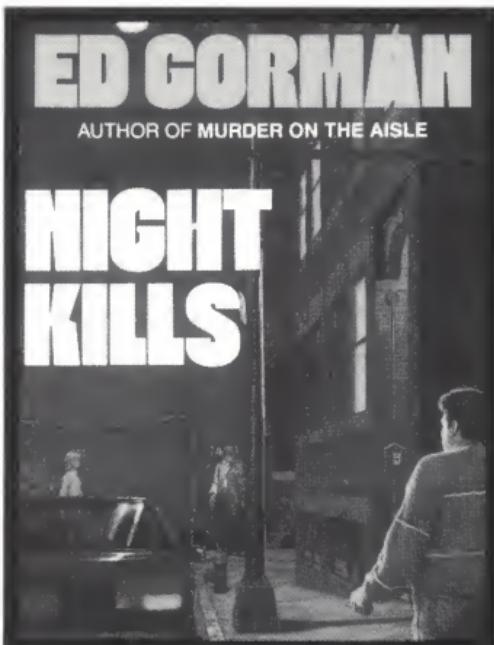
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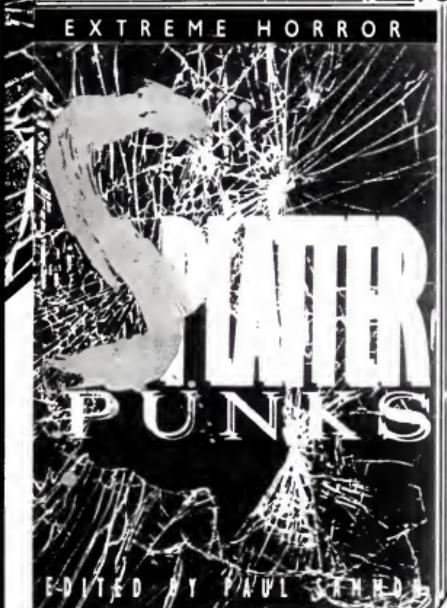
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